University of Alberta

Growing a Family?

The Experiences of Planned Two-Mother Families

by

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©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Human Ecology

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2006

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395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 0-494-13971-4
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 0-494-13971-4

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Abstract

Since the 1990s the number of planned two-mother families has grown exponentially, yet many struggle with social marginalization, invisibility, and stigmatization in society. Two-mother families face many of the same concerns and challenges of heterosexual families in the creation of families, but they also face concerns and challenges out of the realm of heterosexual families. In addition, many studies have combined all types of lesbian-led families, not recognizing the unique features of planned two-mother families.

This study used heuristic inquiry to explore what family means to planned two-mother families in Edmonton, Canada, by asking six intact, planned, two-mother families to tell their family stories and draw pictures of their family. Altogether 12 mothers with a total of 8 children (4 school-aged and 4 toddlers) participated in the study. Heuristic inquiry requires the researcher to be passionate about the topic and highly self reflective. Thus the researcher's family experiences are woven through the document. In addition, the archetype of the tree was used to further illustrate their stories.

Five broad themes emerged from the interviews: (a) building our family tree, which included stories about how the families got pregnant and experienced pregnancy and delivery; (b) extending our branches, which described the strong connections that these families have with extended family, community, and society; (c) droughts and plagues, in which the families spoke about their difficulties and negative experiences in trying to be families; (d) conditions for optimal growth, in which the families spoke about their many successes and accomplishments; and (e) we are extraordinary family trees in a forest of trees, which included the stories that celebrated their families and discusses their

strength. Overall, the families described themselves as functioning as well or better than traditionally structured families. They discussed their children's normal movement through developmental milestones and a high level of parental involvement with their children. They described close parental partnerships with a equal sharing of family roles and responsibilities.

Although these families have often lived in less than ideal environments, through their stories they were able to describe how they were able to thrive as families despite being marginalized.

Acknowledgements

> Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. (Margaret Mead; as cited in *Famous Tree Quotations*, n.d., ¶ 8)

To the roots of this work:

To my first family, the family who raised me and taught me about being a part of an extended family tree.

To the trunk that has kept me strong:

To my life partner, Lisia Morin, for her ongoing support of my educational pursuits and the wonderful chats about trees and circles. To my son, Evan, who has taught me everything I know about being a mom. Your patience while I hung out for 'sixteen hundred years' in the dungeon was phenomenal.

And to the branches:

To my supervisor and mentor, Maryanne Doherty, who was willing to support me in anything I was willing to try, even if it was all new to her. I am honoured to have had the chance to work with you. To the other members of my Doctoral Committee, Berna Skrypnek and Andre Grace: Berna, you were always there to ask the hard questions and make me think that little bit more about what I was really saying. Andre, you presented me with the tools to work outside the box and try to present my work outside of the 'norm.' To Lori Harach and Dianne Oberg, you joined us in the journey in the forest partway through and were able to jump right in and climb up the trees with us; thank you. To Nancy Gibson and Nancy Kerr, who preformed the duties of chair in an elegant manner. To Norah Keating, the Graduate Studies Coordinator for much of my program, thank you for always giving me that extra push to try a bit more and for suggesting a

wonderful external for my final oral. Last, to Katherine Allen, who almost did not make it here all the way from Virginia, thank you for all the thoughtful comments throughout the document and for showing me that being passionate about work is really okay and that planned two-mother families don't always work out. In the two short days that I had the opportunity to talk with you I learned more than you can possibly imagine. My worldview will be forever shifted. I look forward to a *passionate* relationship with you all for many years.

To Bonnie, Michelle, Rose, Sherry Anne, and Tonya who graciously gave of their time to read my document thoroughly and passionately, in order to ask me those hard questions at my mock oral. To Linda, my editor, who fixed my document every time some glitch happened or a preposition ended up at the end of a sentence.

Last, but not least, to the six wonderful families who opened their doors and allowed me to come in to talk to them about their family tree. Without you all of this work could have never happened.

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PREFACE: A NOTE TO MY READERS

The writing of this dissertation was a challenge. The current state of English language and lack of language to describe families headed by lesbians challenged my writing and my thinking throughout the document. The English language lacks a pronoun that does not denote a person's gender. Where possible in this dissertation, contrary to the norm, I have chosen to use the feminine pronoun in referring to a person in order to celebrate the accomplishments of 'womankind.' I often lacked the language to say fully what I felt was needed. I felt the need to make choices to use the language that best fit at this point in time, even though I still was not content with it.

I also found myself challenged by the method to reveal myself, to tell my story to many who do not and will not ever really know me, but also to tell my story to those who know me well. To all of those who read this document, recognize that my story and the stories of others are a work unfolding and are meant to celebrate our lives, even the difficult parts.

The unfolding is a work of layers; it is about me, about my family, about other planned two-mother families, about language, and about the world in which we live. Because paper is but a two-dimensional object, it is difficult to present a multilayered work without the ability to view it in 3D.

The idea to write this document in a multilayered fashion came from reading a book entitled *Troubling the Angels*: *Women Living With HIV/AIDS* by Lather and Smithies (1997). In this book the authors use hypertext to tell their reflective process stories as researchers while running a group for women and HIV and intertext to discuss the archetype of the angel and how it became a metaphor for the work in the group and

the women living with HIV/AIDS. The first intertext that you will read, if you start at the beginning of this document, explains why the metaphor of the tree has been used in this research.

As the reader you may read this dissertation in different ways. Some may choose to start by reading the stories of trees, whereas others may first read my story or the stories of others, and some may choose to read it in chronological order. The different methods of reading create different experiences with the document; all are valid. Like the flow of the seasons and the growth of the rings of the tree, this work is meant to be circular, so enjoy the ebb and flow as you read, regardless of where you start and where you go. You might find yourself riding the wind among the trees and feeling as though you have already visited a particular part of the forest; indeed, that may be true because the presentation of data in a work of heuristic inquiry often takes you through the forest and among the trees more than once.

The metaphor of the tree is woven throughout the dissertation. Trees spoke to me as I wrote and helped me to see the forest, a forest made up of a new species of trees. I saw this new species of trees creating a new-growth forest where all the family trees had two mothers creating a strong trunk. I also saw this new species of trees beginning to grow in the old-growth forests of family trees where the trunks looked much more familiar and were made up of a mother and a father, even if that trunk had split and the two parts were growing up separate from one another.

Enjoy walking among the trees as you read.

INTERTEXT 1: WHY TREES?

When I asked them to draw a picture of their family, two families included a tree and two talked about trees, although one of these two did not draw a tree. As a heuristic researcher I participated in the process of the research, and long before I had even decided to use any metaphor in my dissertation, I drew trees in both my individual and family pictures. When I drew the tree in my family's picture, my son's comment was, "I don't have anything else to draw. Debbie drew my apple tree" (1, 2063). Each member of *my* family told a story about a tree. My son told two stories about trees, one about climbing a tree with one of his cousins and the other about watching a bear and her cubs in a tree. My partner spoke about the role of the tree in her life:

> The tree for me is a very important symbol of my life. It is about life and the tree of life and it dances in the wind and it lets me listen to what is going on and changes through the season and it shows me how things in life change. I just watch the tree and listen to the tree. So it kind of grounds me. (1, 2128)

After looking at all my data, I knew I had to talk about trees in this dissertation too; they were calling out to me in the wind.

How one draws a tree says a lot about her or him. A tree is about self-growth: "Its branches represent how you reach out to others and your environment; . . . branches moving upward show the ability to grasp opportunity; . . . branches turning inward mean you're selfish. . . . small, stunted trees may reveal an inability to grow" (Nelson & Landry, 1992, p. 71). The roots "when emphasized on a tree drawing might indicate that you're probing the past to define yourself better in the present" (p. 62), whereas the shape and size of the trunk can show a lack of energy or passivity or express your confidence

and optimism. Last, leaves are "symbols of life and growth; leaves are associated with dependency or attachment to a nurturing source" (p. 42).

Clinicians who work with individuals in psychological therapy use a well-known projective drawing test that involves trees. This test, best know as the Kinetic-House-Tree-Person (K-H-T-P) test, is widely used, often in combination with talk therapy, to gain information about a client and her or his issues (Burns, 1987). According to Burns, this K-H-T-P technique of having clients draw in therapy originated with the work of Buck (1948; as cited in Burns, 1987), who asked clients to draw a house, a tree, and a person (H-T-P). At about the same time, Hulse (1951; as cited in Burns, 1987) asked his clients to draw a family (D-A-F)—actually, to draw their family—and this instruction often just led to a series of stick figures. Burns and Kaufman (1970; as cited in Burns, 1987) then refined this technique and asked their clients to draw a picture of their whole family doing something together and not to draw a cartoon or stick figures. They called this technique Kinetic Family Drawing (K-F-D). Burns then further refined the technique and called it K-H-T-P, and asked clients to also draw a tree and a house. The difference between the original H-T-P and the current K-H-T-P is that the picture is kinetic and thus tells a story. According to Burns, "The most frequent and universal metaphor for depicting human development is the tree. . . . In drawing a tree, the drawer reflects his or her individual transformation process" (p. 3). Therefore, the connection between the tree, families, and growth has long been recognized in psychological literature as a way to delve into the unconscious thoughts of a person and their environment.

Much more can be said about tree drawings and their interpretation, but that is beyond the scope of this short intertext and this dissertation. I asked families to draw, not

so that I could interpret their drawings, but rather to get them to really start thinking about their family, and in the end to cooperate in drawing a group picture of their family. The invitation to draw a picture to depict their family was successful. The pictures that they drew made them begin to think about their family and focused them for our conversation. The family picture that they drew collectively brought them together as a family at the end of the interview and brought together their stories of their family. These pictures also provided rich information about their family. The in-depth interpretation of these drawings is beyond the scope of this study, but will serve as data for future writing about these families.

During the research and writing of this dissertation, trees kept coming to me from numerous directions. Just before starting my interviews, and long before I knew that I would be talking about trees, my family bought a piece of land up north that is a forest. I have spent time there looking at the trees and now have some of these trees as wallpaper on my computer. It was not until I started writing and rewriting this dissertation that I realized that so many trees had come into my life in the past few years.

Although I have seen trees as a metaphor for the family and our *family trees,* Katherine Allen (2005) so wisely pointed out that trees can also form a barrier, a road block, an impasse, which prevents free movement through an area. I now realize that these old growth trees in their lush forests have actually worked at times to prevent our new seedlings from taking root in the forest. In the past they blocked our seeds' travels on the wind through the forest. In my future research on *family trees* I know I will reflect further on the concept of tree as barrier.

Obviously, trees play a large part in my family. They are also important to other families, and the analogies between families and trees are many. And that is why trees.

CHAPTER 1:

IN THE BEGINNING: THE SEEDS OF THE STORY

> I believe that [like there are two sides to the leaf, one rough and one smooth] it is the smooth side of all of us that sustain our motives, while it is the rough side which bears the burden of conflict. (Sinclair, 2005, ¶ 3)

Introduction

This dissertation is but a branch on my journey of defining and understanding families for me. Throughout this dissertation you, the reader, can travel the forests and visit the family trees that belong to my family and five other planned two-mother families. The growth that is described in this document represents but a point in time, 2004-2005, a time when our family trees are still under attack from those who want to chop us down and deny that we are 'real' or 'normal' families by denying our right to marry or adopt. But it is also a time when our forests are getting thicker. Many more trees have been planted in the past five years, trees that have very strong roots.

I hope that you enjoy the walk through these forests. Walk at a comfortable pace and feel free to follow 'your' path as you too discover what it feels like to walk among a new species of family trees.

Am I Family?

I always knew that I was different, but I didn't know how. Growing up, I realized that my family wasn't like other families in the neighbourhood or on television. My parents separated in the early 1960s when I was a preschooler, and then they divorced. For most of my growing-up years I lived with my grandparents, as well as my mother and

younger brothers. I was always told that I was going to be a doctor and that I was very smart. I wasn't like the other girls, I was told by the adults in my life. What I did know though was that I wanted to be a mom, sometime.

As an adolescent I always had very close female friends. I didn't really have a word to describe how I felt, but society said that I should have a boyfriend. But I was different; I never did, and no one ever asked me why I didn't. Did they know something that I didn't know?

When I was 12 years old I first heard the word *homosexual*. It was used to describe a man in the neighbourhood who was sexually abusing young boys. I was told, "Don't go near him; he is homosexual." I didn't abuse children, so I figured I definitely wasn't one of them.

It wasn't until 1980, in a first-year university class, that I would learn differently. It was a random meeting with a guy in my first-year biology class that began to change things for me. We began to date, and I was very much in lust. About a month after we began dating, he said that he had something to tell me. Up to that point in the relationship we had had long, in-depth talks about the Kinsey scale and homosexuality, but things did not connect for me. That evening he told me that he was gay and that we could no longer see one another. After a moment of initial shock, I said that it didn't matter; I told him I wasn't heterosexual either. I had never said that before, and I am not even sure I knew what I was saying; it just seemed like the right response. We remained friends and made a deal. If I reached 30 years of age and had not become pregnant, we would have a child together. But we lost touch, and, given what AIDS was doing to the gay community in the 1980s, I was not even what had happen to him 10 years later.

Through my 20s I continued through my undergraduate degree in psychology and then a master's in family studies; more specifically, human sexuality. I was looking for answers. During these years I continued to have many very close, but nonsexual relationships with women. However, I did have sex with men, mostly gay and bisexual men. It wasn't that I sought out gay men with whom to be involved; it just kept happening. But I knew that I did not want to have a relationship or children with them. I had publicly defined myself as bisexual and continued to have my relationships with women and sex with men. Although I continued to know that I wanted to have children, I knew that it was not with any of the men I was meeting, with one exception. I ran a sexuality program in the summer between my undergraduate and master's degrees and again met a man who, from the beginning, I knew was bisexual, but so was I. We became fast friends and decided that if I did not become pregnant by 30, we would have a child together.

When I look back at that time, it does not surprise me that I lacked an understanding of my orientation: There were no role models. The only time that I really saw a lesbian was in the movie *Personal Best*. I met gays and lesbians on university campuses throughout my 20s, but somehow I didn't fit into their rather clandestine groups. But then I was extremely focused on school and did not give much thought to long-term relationships.

In 1988 I moved from Ontario, where I had lived my whole life, to a small town in southern Alberta to take a job running a sexuality program. I was 27 years old and approaching that 30 mark. It was in southern Alberta that I really started to spend time in the lesbian community. I began dating women with children whom they had conceived in

previous heterosexual marriages, but that was not enough. I wanted to have a child of my own. A year and a half later I moved to Edmonton with the intention of beginning my PhD. At the age of 29 I met my life partner.

I don't think I ever set out to be a lesbian parent; I set out to be a parent. Somehow, though, I became a lesbian parent. It is as Brian McNaught (1981) said, it is not that I have trouble with my identity; it is that sometimes I resent being so identified with my identity. I am so many things other than a lesbian or a lesbian mother. Although I always knew that I was going to parent, the decision of when, with whom, and how had a significant impact on my relationship. From the beginning we decided that we did want to have children in our relationship. After we had been together for a few years, we began to talk more seriously about it. My plans to have a child soon after my 30th birthday had not been fulfilled. That first friend of mine was nowhere to be found; I still do not know what happened to him or whether he is still alive. However, the other man was still in my life. Although we had both gone on with our lives and now lived in different parts of the country, it was as though we were somehow still psychically connected, and every so often we would just see each other, unexpectedly.

I had a gut feeling that although I was in my early 30s, my ability to become pregnant was soon going to end because the women in my family seem to have gynecological issues as they aged. The 'ticking of my clock' was getting louder. Although my partner is five years older than I am and also wanted to become pregnant, I was determined personally to do it soon. We made plans to meet with my friend in a downtown café to talk seriously about pregnancy. Although for years he was excited about the prospect of having a child, at first with me and now with both my partner and

me, he said no. I never did find out exactly why; he said that it was because he could not see himself not being regularly involved in the child's life, but somehow I felt that there was more to it.

Having now lost both of my sperm donors, my partner and I ventured out to ask others. In all, we approached three gay men who we knew were interested in having children. Because of circumstances in their lives, they all turned us down. We now felt that we were left with no choice but to consider another method. Having worked in the reproductive health field for over 10 years, I knew that there was a fertility clinic in our city, as well as sperm banks in other parts of Canada from which one could order sperm. I began to investigate, and I quickly found out that there was absolutely no access to the fertility clinic in our city for single women or lesbians. We were left with three choices: to try to find a clinic in Canada or the US that would inseminate lesbians, to advertise for a donor, or to approach a sperm bank with the hope of finding a doctor outside of the fertility clinic who was doing inseminations. In the end we approached a sperm bank and through that sperm bank found a doctor in our city who did not ask a lot of questions about why one might want to become pregnant that way.

Before approaching the doctor, my partner and I went through the list of potential donors and picked some in whom we were interested. We asked the clinic to send us more information about our five choices, then narrowed it down to two, and asked for even further information to be sent out. Finally, we decided on a donor. That was when I approached the doctor. I did not say that I was a lesbian, but I also did not say that I was not. I was worried that using the 'L' word might ruin my chances with this doctor because he was the only one who would inseminate single women in this city, according

to the sperm bank. He accepted me as a client, and within two cycles I was pregnant. I never went back to that doctor; I had received what I had gone after.

The pregnancy progressed normally. We were considering a home birth because we had a feeling that the hospitals were not ready for lesbian couples. My partner and I knew of only one other couple who had had a child together, and they had had a home birth. About five months into the pregnancy we had our first run-in with the medical field. My partner was not allowed to come in to see the ultrasound. "Husbands and boyfriends only," we were told. This only confirmed our desire to have a home birth, and the delivery when well; we were surrounded by a wonderful team of midwives and family members.

Parenting was much harder than I thought it would be, but luckily I had a wonderful partner who stepped up to the plate immediately. As I have progressed through my career and now my PhD, she has continued to put family first.

I knew that I would not want to be pregnant again. A few years after we gave birth to our son, my partner decided to try to become pregnant. The fertility clinics were still not an option, and we went through the same route that I had gone a few years before. Unfortunately, she could not carry a pregnancy and miscarried a number of times. Later we decided to try a known donor, and we placed an advertisement in some gay and lesbian publications and found some donors that way. But again she miscarried. The last miscarriage was much further along, and its impact on both her and the family led her to the decision that she would not try again. Perhaps if we had had access to better resources, such as a fertility clinic, we would have been successful.

Very early in the relationship she had a dream that we would have three children. We both knew now that these three children would not be conceived by us. Instead, we decided to try to adopt through the province. When we approached the adoption department of the provincial government, we were greeted very positively because of our skills and knowledge in parenting through adversity. They told us that they had a child for us immediately. However, what we quickly found out was that that original positive reception was the exception to the rule. It has now been over five years, and no same-sex couple has adopted through the public system in this province. We gained access to our adoption file and found out that, although many potential placements had been arranged, they had been prevented from coming to fruition by government bureaucrats who did not feel that same-sex couples should adopt.

So for now we are a family of three, two moms and a loving son. I have many memorable stories about our life as a family, but I will leave those to unfold in this dissertation. Many days I still feel as though I live with one foot in each world, in each forest—gay and straight. My biculturalism means that I must talk two languages, understand and behave in two cultures, and withstand the prejudice of being a minority, albeit an invisible minority. Maybe some day this will not be the case.

All these personal experiences, which include my academic journey, have led me to strongly identify myself as a lesbian and a feminist. So today, I am many things, a lesbian, a mother, a partner, an activist, and a feminist - all labels that I wear proudly; although maybe someday lesbian will not be the first label with which people identify me.

Ontology and Epistemology

Research results are influenced by the paradigm of the researcher. For this reason it is important to know not only the researcher's methods of data collection, but also the researcher's ontology and epistemology.

Ontology: What Do We Understand About the Nature of Reality?

The *ontology* of a researcher can be defined as her or his view or understanding of the nature of reality or being: "What is the nature of the knowable?" (Guba, 1990, p. 18). I believe that objective reality can never be captured and thus does not exist. This view is often termed *relativistic*. Reality is socially constructed by individuals and groups and thus can shift over time or between groups. Therefore, what is reality for one person or group right now could well not be so for another or for that group one moment later. Reality is a momentary concept, and thus multiple realities exist at any one time. This is not to say that reality cannot be the same for people, because there can be "community consensus regarding what is real, what is useful, and what has meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, p. 264); but this still does not make it one objective reality. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered. What we take to be objective knowledge and truth is really just the result of our perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). I believe that objective reality does not exist and that individuals in relationship with their environments socially construct what we call reality. It is possible that there can be community consensus on what is real, but it is still a subjective concept. This ontology has driven my research.

Because I believe that there is not one reality, but many, I believe that each family creates its own reality, which may or may not be shared with other families. I also believe

that it is possible that not all members of the grouping see themselves as part of a family. Thus individuals may include or exclude members differently in their shared grouping. I believe that if individuals define themselves as a family, then they are a family. For this reason I cannot give just one definition of what constitutes a family. For the purpose of this particular research study I chose to delimit my definition of family. The families whom I interviewed for this study were but a small, selected subgroup of all possible combinations of what constitutes a family to me. Later in this chapter I will discuss my definition of family for this study and what family is in a broader sense in the literature review section when I further examine past research on family.

Epistemology: How Do We Know What We Know? What Are Our Beliefs?

The *epistemology* from which one operates influences how one sees the world (one's worldview) and whether there is one reality or many. "An epistemology is more than a way of knowing; it is a system of knowing that has both an internal logic and external validity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003b, p. 399). The epistemology that best fits my way of knowing is *constructivism*, which can be defined as an epistemology in which one believes that there are multiple realities or truths (Patton, 2002), that reality is subjective, and that the understanding of reality is co-created between the researcher and the researched and may change over time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). "Constructivist inquirers seek to understand the contextualized meaning, to understand the meaningfulness of human actions and interactions" (Greene, 2003, p. 597).

A constructivist epistemology can be easily linked back to a relativist ontology by recognizing that

> what people think about the world will influence how they act in it. . . . People construct reality. . . . There are actually many "realities" and possible realities that

> we negotiate on an ongoing basis; any attempt to uncover the social reality will thus be fruitless. (Palys, 1997, p. 19)

"The stories we tell one another will change, and the criteria for reading stories will also change. And this is how it should be" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a, p. 488). Guba and Lincoln (1989) summarized the basic tenets of a constructivist epistemology as follows: There is more than one truth, and truth is achieved through consensus among those experiencing the phenomenon; facts have no meaning outside of the framework to which they belong; and the phenomenon can be understood only within the context in which it is being studied. In other words, the truth and meaning are subjective and change depending on the context and those involved.

Further, as a constructivist I believe that there are multiple realities or truths and that individuals socially construct them. Hence, our life stories and situational narratives change as they are retold and as there are changes in our environments, and thus in our realities. Therefore, the researcher, through conversations with those involved in the research, discovers what a phenomenon means and co-creates with the participant what we call knowledge. This is what has happened in this study.

In addition, I believe that the lens and standpoint that we use in our research influence what we find. As a member of a planned two-mother family, but not a member of *the* family, I could hear the stories of planned two-mother families from both the emic (inside) and the etic (outside) perspective. I have taken the view that planned two-mother families are not marginal but are central to the discussion of what the experiences of planned two-mother families are, and therefore comparing them to what some might call the 'norm' would have been erroneous.

Because I am a researcher in heuristic inquiry, the impetus of the study was my experiences and passion for the phenomenon. My scholarly knowledge formed the backdrop from which I was able to conduct research I was passionate about. Other families were involved in the research and interviewed to further examine the question. Heuristic inquiry legitimizes and privileges the researcher's experiences with the phenomenon and retains the essence of the person in the experience of the phenomenon. "At the heart of heuristics lies an emphasis on disclosing the self as a way of facilitating disclosure from others" (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 50). For this reason I have retained and privileged the individual family stories in this dissertation. Although the common themes are also important, it is those stories that tell the reader about the families' and my experiences.

Because it was heuristics that guided my study, the data are presented in story form. These stories are written through the perspective of both the researcher and the researched. For this reason the reader of a heuristic inquiry document often finds herself or himself hearing parts of the same story more than once. Repetition of narrative is part of heuristic inquiry. The same story through the possibly differing perspectives of the researcher and the researched may be of one shared reality, or it may be presented from a different reality. In defining reality I looked to the families to share their reality and described their realities in a number of sections—family depictions, composite depiction, family portraits, and themes (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985; Kaiser, 1998; Moustakas, 1990a; Sela-Smith, 2002). This is the nature of heuristic inquiry that is carried out by a researcher with a relativist ontology.

Methodology: The Study of Methods That Allow Us To Study the World

In brief, methodology is the study of methods. The method that is used to engage in research is influenced by one's ontology and epistemology. From a relativistic constructivist perspective, qualitative methods allow for more subjectivity in the research question and also lend themselves better to studies that are exploratory in nature and that have small samples. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow the researcher to study the meaning of a phenomenon or lived experience. I believe that the method that best suits my research on planned two-mother families is heuristic inquiry. This method, which has its origin in phenomenology, allows the researcher to stay central to the research and not have to bracket herself from a lived experience that she is passionate about studying and it allows for a relativist constructivist researcher to carrying out sound research while staying true to self.

Assumptions

It is important for researchers to acknowledge any assumptions that they may have made before they begin the research. Depending on the method that the researcher chooses for her study, it may be necessary to explicitly state the assumptions and attempt to bracket them so that they do not interfere with the research. I chose to use heuristic inquiry to conduct this study. Heuristic inquiry privileges the researcher's own experiences with the phenomena and has the expectation that the researcher's own thoughts (and assumptions) will actually frame the research (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985; Sela-Smith, 2002). In this section I will briefly discuss some of my assumptions regarding planned two-mother families.

I believe that lesbians can truly form families and that the families they form are as good as, if not better than, the 'traditional' nuclear families of mom, dad, and children. I have come to this conclusion through reviewing the literature (e.g., Brewaeys, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1999; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 1992; Tasker, 1999) and looking at my own family and other lesbian-led and heterosexual-led families whom I know. I believe that lesbian-led families share many of the attributes of heterosexual-led families, but that they also must deal with a whole series of issues that are out of the realm of heterosexual families, such as marginalization and stigmatization.

I am assuming that there are some commonalities among lesbian couples who have conceived in a lesbian relationship and that these couples are different from those who have conceived in a different family form. I also assume that these families differ from families who have adopted their children, regardless of the type of relationship in which the adoption occurred. This assumption was also born out in the literature (e.g., Dalton & Bielbey, 2000; Nelson, 1999).

Having stated that there are commonalities among these families, one could argue that I am making an essentialist argument, that I am trying to say that there is an essential underlying meaning or fundamental nature regarding planned two-mother families that is not socially constructed. However, I do believe that the properties that make up families, and in this case, planned two-mother families, are socially constructed and thus are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed by those who reside in and around them and those that study them. I believe these commonalities could be but artefacts of a particular time and place. Past research, in its haste to prove that lesbians can be good mothers, has created a typology of lesbian-led families that demonstrates that these

families have certain characteristics that set them apart from heterosexual-led families. These characteristics have often led these families to be viewed as a superior family form when it comes to parenting children. Therefore, my statement, that I believe that planned two-mother families are as good as, if not better than, the 'traditional' nuclear families, of mom, dad, and children, at raising children, exists in this time and place and may well not hold true at a different point in time or space. I have struggled with my assumptions in this area since I have studied in a predominantly post positivistic education in science and psychology. Even today, I still struggle to not essentialize planned two-mother families.

From a human ecological perspective, a somewhat radical feminist perspective, and a lesbian perspective, all of which I embrace, I believe that context and location are important in defining my sample of planned two-mother families. I have therefore limited my sample because I feel that there are some inherent differences in planned two-mother families and their ability to function, depending on the city, province, and country in which they live. I also believe that the constructs of gender and family are pluralistic: They change over time, and they can accurately be defined only by those within them. For this reason I believe that only those involved in the grouping can define themselves as planned two-mother families with a child that they conceived together. Thus the families in this study defined themselves as fitting within the study's criteria. I did not exclude anyone who felt that they fit the definition.

The Role of Storytelling in Research

Our personal stories and lives are "shaped, influenced, and to a great extent limited by the repertoire of available narratives and the dominant social discourses in the larger surround" (Laird, 1998, p. 199). "Finding new meanings is particularly important

for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals and their families, because mainstream culture at best ignores homosexuality or at worst is deeply pathologizing" (Malley & Tasker, 1999, p. 20). Listening to the stories of planned two-mother families without imposing an a priori frame, attending to the multiple strands of their narratives, and recognizing my own struggles as part of the phenomenon that I studied were important.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003a), lived experience cannot be captured directly; it is created by and influenced by the researcher and writer. Thus these experiences and the researcher's interpretation of them are neither neutral nor objective; they are shaped by the lens through which we view them, which in turn is influenced by the race, class, gender, ethnicity, language, and sexual orientation of the researcher and the researched. "The researcher's task is to accurately reflect, as if in a mirror, in words the interpretive analysis of interactions that have given meaning to experience" (Munhall, 2001, p. 177). "Through narratives, individuals give meaning to their lives, affirm their identities, and present their relationships as viable and valid" (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001a, p. 11). It is through the telling of their stories and the ongoing creations of their narratives that people come to validate their lives and those of their community. When these stories are retold in written form or verbally and others read or hear the narratives, the stories promote new and alternative ways of seeing the phenomenon; in this case, the family.

Weeks et al. (2001a) described three kinds of parenting stories that are told by lesbian-led families. First are the stories of impossibilities, which are the stories of lesbian couples who, because of their demographics or geographic location, have had and continue to have no access to parenting. Second are the stories of opportunities. The

lesbians who tell these stories became parents while in heterosexual relationships, and then came out as lesbians. The third type of parenting stories that lesbians tell are stories of choice. These are the stories told by lesbians who have chosen to become parents without letting go of their lesbian identity. They have become parents through adoption or foster care or have become pregnant through some sort of assisted reproductive technique such as insemination. The stories told in this document are the stories of choice.

Research Question

The original idea for this research came from my personal experiences as a member of a planned two-mother family. I had a passion to give voice to the stories of planned two-mother families, including my own. I wanted to be able to allow a wide audience of individuals to better understand what it means to be a part of a planned two-mother family and to describe the pressures that make it difficult to become and to be such families today. There has been very little written about lesbian-led families that does not compare them to heterosexual families, group all lesbian-led families together as though they are all the same, or focus on the individual rather than the family. Moreover, very little of the research has been carried out in Canada. Currently, we know very little about Canadian planned two-mother families. This lack of information has led me to ask the following question: What are the lived experiences of planned two-mother families? This question then prompted me to ask planned two-mother families to tell me about their families. These questions and my own experience as a member of a planned two-mother family led me to choose heuristic inquiry to carry out the research. As a human ecologist, my interest in the lived experiences of these families extends to looking at them through

the systems outlined in human/family ecological theory. As a lesbian feminist, it is also important to me to give voice to these families with children regarding their struggles, strains, or successes within their existing environments.

I believe that it is important to give planned two-mother families the opportunity to tell their family stories because it is through the retelling of our family stories that we grow and recognize our strengths and celebrate our diversities. Only recently, have planned two-mother families been given opportunities to tell their stories.

The Importance of Language and Definitions

Part of defining ourselves is the creation of a common language—oral, written, and visual. "Language not only reflects relationships but also partially constructs them" (Benkov, 1995, p. 172).

Some researchers, such as Weston (1991), have referred to lesbian-led families as *alternative* families, but, in my belief, this term does not accurately capture lesbian-led families because an alternative is a substitute for something else (often the norm), and the norm is often seen as the traditional family of mom, dad, and their biological children. Thus, if lesbian-led families are defined as alternative families to *the* traditional family and we define *the* traditional family as caring, nurturing, bonded, and responsible for raising healthy children, then this might imply that alternative families are uncaring, neglectful, detached, and irresponsible. Reimann (1997) used the term *lesbian nuclear family* to describe a lesbian-led family who is composed of a lesbian couple and their children. Although this type of family most closely resembles the heterosexual nuclear family, the term lesbian nuclear family does not make it clear that there are two mothers

who conceived child(ren) together, so this term also does not clearly define the families in this study.

Even the term *family of choice* to describe a lesbian-led family compared to *the* family is also inaccurate because it presupposes that heterosexuals do not choose their families. To even call a family a lesbian-led family is inaccurate because it is individuals, not families, who have sexual orientations (Allen & Demo, 1995). In addition, it reduces the whole family to a sexual identity rather than viewing it as a family. For this reason I have chosen to use the term *lesbian-led family* to describe a family headed by at least one woman who defines herself as a lesbian, although I am still not completely comfortable with this choice of terminology. This term does not clearly state that there are two women leading the family, nor does it make it clear that there are children in the family. Moreover, this term does not state what the relationship is between the adults and the children. The family could be one in which there are no children, or one in which the children were conceived in a previous heterosexual relationship, or lastly, one in which the children were conceived in the current lesbian relationship. Therefore the terminology I have used to describe the families whom I interviewed is *planned two-mother families*. This term makes it clear that there are two mothers who planned to have a family (and child(ren)) together. The words in this term are defined as follows:

Planned: an adjective meaning to devise, design, and/or carry out according to a plan (Miller, Fellbaum, & Tengi, 2005).

Plan: a strategy or method worked out in advance for the execution of a goal (Miller, Fellbaum, & Tengi, 2005).

Two-mother: more than one mother.

Mother: A woman who is parenting a child. Thus the term *two-mother* refers to two women who are both involved in parenting a child.

Family: There are many definitions of the family in the literature. The one that I have chosen to use, because of its depth, is that of the Vanier Institute of the Family (2005):

> Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following:
>
> - Physical maintenance and care of group members
> - Addition of new members through procreation or adoption
> - Socialization of children
> - Social control of members
> - Production, consumption, distribution of goods and services, and
> - Affective nurturance—love. (¶ 2)

Therefore, for the purposes of this research, a *planned two-mother family* is a group of three or more individuals who live together, who are emotionally committed to one another, and who are interdependent over time. Two of the individuals are women who define themselves as lesbians who have conceived a child(ren) together whom they are now parenting together.

I believe that there could be a similar debate around the language used to define how lesbians become pregnant. Traditionally, the term *artificial insemination* has been used to describe the process of a woman becoming pregnant in some way other than through heterosexual intercourse. The problem that I have with this term is that I do not see the process as artificial. Possibly the process is better termed *assisted insemination, assisted conception, alternative insemination, alternative conception, or assisted reproduction,* although all of these terms are flawed to some degree as well. No one of these terms will be used throughout this dissertation because no one of these terms fully

captures all the ways in which these planned two-mother families conceived their children. Rather, the terms used in this dissertation to describe how these families became pregnant will be left to the families.

Furthermore, the term *mother* can also be problematic. Who is a mother, and what term do we use to define her? The literature tended to use the term *biological mother* to refer to the woman who has given birth to the child. Some would say this is the *real* mother. On the other hand, the literature has used the terms *social mother*, *co-mother*, or *co-parent* to describe a lesbian who has been in relationship with another lesbian who during their relationship becomes pregnant with a child (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Parks, 1998). This social mother, co-mother, or co-parent may or may not have legally adopted the child. Regardless of this *other* mother's legal entitlement to the child, often society still does not see her as a mother.

Finally, the term *stepmother* has been used to describe a woman who forms a relationship with a birth mother who has a child from a prior relationship (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999; Nelson, 1996; Parks, 1998). The woman then may become a mother to the child through her relationship with the biological mother. This woman also may or may not have legally adopted the child. In addition, she may have her motherhood questioned by those who believe that only the biological mother is a mother. A lesbian stepmother's entitlement to call herself a mother to the child is often doubted more than that of a lesbian social mother.

I have chosen to adopt the following terminology. *Lesbian stepmothers* are women who have joined a family after it has been formed and the children have been born, whereas *lesbian social mothers* have been present since before the child was born.

Last, the term *normal* can also be problematic. A recent readers' theatre performance at the University of Alberta recited "179 Ways to Say 'Normal'" (Sumara, Davis, Filax, & Walsh, 2005). With so many potential definitions of this single word, it is easy to see why its use is problematic. For the purposes of this paper, *normal* will be used in the context of describing what is the standard, norm, or average of a behaviour, cognition, or attitude, or what is the convention for the majority of society, the *heteronormal* (Warner, 1993) way of doing things.

Summary

As Gabb (2004a) so eloquently stated, "As a lesbian mother myself, I situate 'my story' as one among the many that appear in this research; my experiences and status are embedded within the research process" (p. 168). In the end, the goal of this research was not to be able to generalize the findings to all planned two-mother families, but rather to begin to understand these families and how they fit into the fabric of society—how this new species of trees grows within a predominantly old-growth forest. And the story now begins. . . .

INTERTEXT 2: THE STORY OF THE SACRED TREE

> Among archetypal images, the Sacred Tree is one of the most widely known symbols on Earth. There are few cultures in which the Sacred Tree does not figure: as an image of the cosmos, as a dwelling place of gods or spirits, as a medium of prophecy and knowledge, and as an agent of metamorphoses when the tree is transformed into human or divine form or when it bears a divine or human image as its fruit or flowers. (McDowell & McDowell, 1998; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 9)

> For all the people of the earth, the Creator has planted a *Sacred Tree* under which they may gather, and there find healing, power, wisdom, and security. The roots of this tree spread deep into the body of Mother Earth. Its branches reach upward like hands praying to Father Sky. The fruits of this tree are the good things that Creator has given to the people: teachings that show the path to love, compassion, generosity, patience, wisdom, justice, courage, respect, humility, and many other wonderful gifts.
>
> The ancient ones taught us that the life of the Tree is the life of the people. If the people wander far away from the productive shadow of the Tree, if they forget to seek the nourishment of its fruit, or if they should turn against the Tree and attempt to destroy it, great sorrow will fall upon the people. (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984, p. 7)

In this Native Canadian legend there is but one tree under which all people gather. When we are healthy as a society, we are united under the tree and all share in its gifts. When groups lose sight of the tree or are forced away from it, all people suffer. It is time for *all* families—my family and the families who graciously gave of themselves to be a part of this work—to be with the Sacred Tree. *All* families will prosper when we are again under the tree.

CHAPTER 2: THE ROOTS OF THE RESEARCH: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

> We have nothing to fear and a great deal to learn from trees, that vigorous and pacific tribe which without stint produces strengthening essences for us, soothing balms, and in whose gracious company we spend so many cool, silent and intimate hours. (Proust; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 88)

Introduction

Immersion in the literature is a significant part of heuristic inquiry. Although there has been an increasingly large amount of literature written about lesbians, very little of it has been written about lesbian-led families where the unit of analysis is the family and not the individual. Further, much of the literature is still comparative in design and/or has not distinguished between the different types of families headed by lesbians—planned versus blended, conceived versus adopted. The following chapter is an overview of the literature from the last few decades on families, lesbian-led families, and planned two-mother families. This literature is reviewed through my lens of a lesbian feminist human ecologist.

What Is a Family?

"Families matter—to individuals, communities, and society as a whole" (Bogenschneider, 2002, p. xi). We all belong to at least one family, yet defining family on a societal level can be extremely difficult. The word *family* brings up powerful and pervasive images. The institution of the family can be seen as a foundation within our society, the most powerful emotional system to which we will ever belong. However, the meaning of the word family can vary significantly depending on how it is used and by

whom. Issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation complicate it. Defining family can be so contentious that it is often the case that a definition of family is left out of family textbooks and presentations on the family. Few of the current definitions of family really work for planned two-mother families.

In the past three decades family life has undergone dramatic transformations because of dramatic changes that have occurred in society (Bogenschneider, 2002). Families do not exist in a vacuum; thus, as society changed, so did families. Overall, families do better when they are supported in caring communities by close friendships and good services. Families are the strongest teachers of moral lessons: "They are the only institution primarily based on love and caring; families teach connectedness and commitment" (p. 30).

During the last few decades academics studying the family have experienced a paradigm shift from viewing the family as a monolithic entity to recognizing family pluralism (Allen & Demo, 1995). Although there has been recognition of new family forms, the family literature has all but ignored lesbian- and gay-led families. Doherty, Boss, LaRossa, Schumm, and Steinmetz (1993) reported that research on lesbian- and gay-led families is one of the "major streams of family scholarship that have not yet influenced mainstream family science" (p. 16). Demo and Allen (1996) stated that lesbian-led families "challenge dominant theories of family structure and process" (p. 415) and thus find themselves excluded from the mainstream family literature. Sexist and heterosexist assumptions still underlie the majority of the research on families. Lesbians and gay men are still often seen not as family members, but rather as individuals who in many cases are antifamily and/or estranged from their families of origin. For example,

according to Bibby (2004), only 46% of Canadians felt that a same-sex couple with children constitutes a family, yet over 60% of the same people felt that same-sex couples are able to do a good job of raising children. According to Asten (1997), the limited research that has been done on lesbian-led families has failed to address the unique internal structures of such families. These families "embark on a life course for which there is scant social recognition and validation" (Speziale & Gopalakrishna, 2004, p. 175), one in which there are no role models or standards of how to parent effectively.

When the three aspects of family status or role that Patterson (1998) outlined—psychological, legal, and biological—are re-examined, it becomes obvious that they do not work well for planned two-mother families. Traditionally, all three of these family life roles have corresponded with one another. Couples meet, fall in love, marry, and have children. Today this life course definition of a family is less true, especially for *alternative* family forms such as planned two-mother families. Lesbian-led families in Alberta do not follow the same life course that heterosexual-led families follow because until recently have been denied the right to marry, and having children together is still difficult. This different life course could mean that biological, psychological, social, political, economic, spiritual, and environmental influences affect planned two-mother families differently than they do traditional families; thus, typologies such as Patterson's can be limiting to planned two-mother families. As Allen (2005) states, this typology is superimposing 'homophobia' onto lesbian-led families who fell they cannot be different from heterosexual-led families and still be a family.

Other authors have defined family differently. Hartman (1999) identified five possible criteria for determining family status—the degree of emotional commitment and

interdependence, financial interdependence, cohabitation, longevity, and exclusivity—that would define planned two-mother families as families. Yet it is interesting to note that for a heterosexual couple it is unimportant whether or not they meet all of the above criteria or what their behaviour and the nature of their commitment are, whether they are living together, what type of relationship they have, or whether they are legally married; they are defined by society as a family if they have children. Functional definitions of family such as Hartman's work better in defining planned two-mother families than do structural ones. But when a family is seen in terms of its practices and not its forms, meanings, and structures, it is possible to say that many lesbians *do family* in similar ways to heterosexuals—or do they? (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001b). This question needs to be further explored, especially given the assumption that it would be unwise to make an essentialist argument that *all* lesbian-led families function better, or that they are all the same. Whether a family is successful at being a functional family depends greatly on who is defining the terms and for what purpose. In addition, it must be viewed in relation to the time in which it exists.

Walsh (1993) listed 10 processes that she considered important for healthy family functioning: connectedness and commitment; respect for individual differences and autonomy; mutual respect, support, and equitability; nurturance, protection, and socialization of children; organizational stability; adaptability; open communication; effective problem solving and conflict resolution; a shared belief system; and adequate resources for basic economic security and psychosocial support. These 10 attributes or processes can be applied to planned two-mother families, just as they can to heterosexual families, although caution must be taken not to apply them in a way that further

stigmatizes or marginalizes planned two-mother families, especially if they are further marginalized by race, class, or disability. Further, in the literature on what makes a family strong, Cole, Clark, and Gable (1999) listed eight qualities of strength: high adaptability, openly showing appreciation for one another, clear roles, a commitment to family, clear communication, strong community and families ties, encouragement of individuals to develop inside and outside the family, and shared quality and quantity time. I believe many past researchers on lesbian-led families would say that these families often possess all eight of these qualities.

It is my opinion that one of the most comprehensive and usable definitions of the family for planned two-mother families comes from the Vanier Institute of the Family (2005), which was discussed in Chapter 1 of this document.

Although many of these existing definitions of family could work for planned two-mother families, none are a perfect fit as a result of the fact that planned two-mother families experience a level of oppression because of their minority status that other types of families do not experience. Briefly, Clarke (2002) described four dimensions of difference of lesbian families. They are (a) no different from heterosexual families, (b) different from heterosexual families and deviant, (c) different from heterosexual families and transformative, or (d) different from heterosexual families, but only because of the oppression they face. Each of these categories has merit, but depending on which one a researcher espouses, the results of the work will differ. I feel that Clarke's third and fourth dimensions, different and transformative and last, different and transformative only because of the oppression they face, best speak to my view of planned two-mother families. Clarke further argued that both insisting on difference and refusing to see the

difference maintain the power imbalance that keeps lesbian-led families marginalized. Instead of continuing the debate on sameness and differentness, it is time, as Benkov (1995) advised, to move past a comparative view of lesbian-led families and begin to view these families as central to the definition of family rather than marginal. She believed that moving lesbian-led families to the centre of our theorizing will allow us to ask lesbian-led families questions such as "What is family?" Building further on the work of Clarke and Benkov, I believe that when a researcher views lesbian-led families as central to a definition of family and different by virtue of the oppression they face, yet transformative in the dimensions of their family, this inherently means that the research that is done is not comparative to the 'norm' because this again marginalizes these families. This concept of seeing those often marginalized as central to the research question is not new to family scholars, but it is often not well represented in the academic literature.

What Does the Academic Literature on Families Offer to the Study of Lesbian-Led Families?

Allen and Demo (1995) and Clark and Serovich (1997) examined the extent to which the family literature and marriage and family journals included information on gays and lesbians. Similarly, Goldfried (2001) looked at the integration of gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues into mainstream psychological literature. All three of these studies found that less than 1% of all articles published in the journals they reviewed were about lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals; and of those, few looked at families. Most of the limited number of articles published on lesbian-led families have been comparative quantitative studies, which in many cases were driven by a desire to prove or disprove

that these families were psychopathological or dysfunctional families compared to heterosexual-led families. The majority of past research on lesbians with children has focused on the 'normalcy' of the family and the impact of the family on the children (Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Gartrell et al., 1996; Gartrell et al., 1999; Gartrell et al., 2000; Parks, 1998; Perry et al., 2004). Few researchers have stated that their purpose was to highlight the strengths of such families. Goldfried suggested that in trying to understand a group of individuals by looking at only those having problems coping with life, professionals in the field face the danger of drawing biased conclusions about those individuals (and families). Furthermore, Allen and Demo concluded that although there has been a gradual increase in the number of articles on same-sex issues in the family research journals, lesbians continue to be "commonly ignored, poorly understood, stigmatized, and problematized" (p. 117). These researchers noted that some journals actually systematically and deliberately excluded articles with gay and lesbian content and deliberately excluded homosexuals from their research on families to avoid influencing the results of their study. Thus, excluding lesbians and lesbian-led families from broader studies on families has led to the only studies on lesbian-led families being those that set them apart from or compare them to *The* Family (Benkov, 1995). By failing to study this growing type of family, academics are missing the opportunity to study a family type that can have "positive outcomes in the face of adversity, . . . which in turn can inform interventions and resiliency research" (Litovich & Langhout, 2004, p. 412).

In the past few years there has been a 'gayby boom' (Dunne, 2000), an increase in the number of lesbians choosing to become pregnant. But this boom has not led to a boom of academic literature on these families. I was not able to find studies on lesbian-

led families where whole families were interviewed, either together or separately. For this reason it is very difficult to discuss the characteristics of these families. This situation has changed little in the past decade even though Demo and Allen (1996) highlighted this issue a decade ago.

In addition to the systematic exclusion of research on lesbian- and gay-led families from the mainstream family journals, there has also been a similar exclusion of these families from the prominent family theories. A decade ago Demo and Allen (1996) highlighted this point, yet, to this day, many family theories still view these families as outside of the dominant family theories.

Much of the past research has focused on "evaluating predictions of negative consequences for the children growing up in lesbian families" (Lambert, 2005, p. 49):

> It has been suggested that further comparisons of gay and lesbian families to heterosexual families does not serve a purpose in future research and, in fact, perpetuates heterocentrism and homophobia in our culture. Researchers need to instead consider the strengths that children of gay and lesbian households may develop. (p. 49)

In addition, Benkov (1995) stated that the vast majority of studies on families headed by lesbians lack any depth of description about the families and that "they focused on what was not true about lesbian headed families—what the children were not" (p. 52). Benkov contended that to do credible research on lesbian-led families, researchers must view the families as central to the question and ask questions of the families that will allow the rich, descriptive details of who they are to come forth.

Early research on lesbian-led families focused on those families in which the children were conceived in a heterosexual union. Some researchers have been critical of the findings of this research because the impact of parental separation and divorce, as

well as the impact of spending their early years in a two-parent heterosexual-led family, has not been fully investigated. In addition, much of the early research on lesbian-led families was undertaken to prove that these families could parent children without causing them psychological harm. To this end, the research tended to use standardized quantitative tests and often compared lesbian-led families to heterosexual-led matched controls. Although these studies told us a great deal about lesbian-led families, they did not include an in depth exploration of what lesbian-led families were, nor how they viewed themselves. These types of qualitative studies can about a decade later.

Qualitative studies have been conducted on lesbian-led families, but researchers have not limited their sample to just planned two-mother families. Asten (1997), Benkov (1995), Gabb (1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c), and Morrow (2001) all interviewed lesbian-led families and asked them to discuss their families. Similarly to me, all of these researchers are self-identified as lesbians, and both Gabb and Benkov included themselves in the research studies and guided their research with a qualitative approach.

Using a feminist participatory research approach, Asten (1997) made an ethnographic film about four lesbian-led families. She asked them a series of questions about their family as well as observed them while filming for approximately 10 to 12 hours. Each of the families was formed differently, and in some of the interviews not all family members agreed to participate in the research. Not surprisingly, she found that the stories that each of the families told were quite different from those of the others and that one of the few similarities was that they all discussed issues regarding how they defined family, although she did not talk about this finding in detail in her book.

In a series of articles from her doctoral research, Gabb (1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) described in detail various aspects of lesbian-led families. In her study she interviewed 21 families, 13 in depth (18 parents and 13 children). The majority of the children were conceived in a heterosexual marriage. The children participated in parts of the interview process. The families were asked to share information about themselves with the researcher as well as to tell their family's stories. Gabb (2004a) found that although the stories were told both by the birth mother and the 'other' mother, there was essentially only one story of family life. She found that the stories were constructed from a shared belief system and were reflective, which illustrated to her that these stories had been worked over by the family and represented an agreed-upon position of the family. This is not to say that there is only one type of lesbian-led family, rather, it is important to recognize the similar patterns among the families and the overlap in the content of the stories they tell of their family.

Benkov's (1995) main question in her research of lesbian- and gay-led families was, "What is family?" She listened to their stories and concluded from them that these families, when viewed not as marginal families but as successful families, have much to offer other types of families regarding how to parent and be a family outside of society's prescribed roles. However, she did not report her findings by type of lesbian-led family; therefore it is impossible to know whether the stories of different sorts of lesbian-led families (e.g. planned and intact, planned but separated, step families) differed.

Morrow (1999, 2001) did a large-scale study on lesbian-led families and storytelling. Morrow (1999) felt that, in the absence of the ability to marry and form families as heterosexuals can, storytelling becomes vested with some of the family- and

community-forming functions. The telling of these family stories within the family and in the community serves to empower the family and legitimizes its existence. In her 2001 article Morrow reported that she asked lesbian mothers to describe their favourite family story. Children were not included in the interviews although all of those interviewed did have children, albeit in different ways. She found that the most widely told story was a confirmative narrative that verified and announced family membership.

In summary, although some of the research did involve couples together in an interview, the majority of studies that examined lesbian-led families interviewed the members separately and/or gave the family members standardized tests to complete alone. Children were interviewed in some of the studies, but again they were not interviewed at the same time as their parents, even though one or both parents might have been present when they were interviewed (but did not participate in their interview). I searched the databases that contained journals specific to the family and searched a wide array of journals that contained articles about families, and more specifically lesbian-led families for information regarding participants.

Furthermore, I was not able to find research in which the participants were asked to draw pictures of their family (or create any type of art or perform any kinetic activity) alone or together during the interview. The drawing in this study was used to focus those in the study on thinking about their family before we began the interview and to draw them together in the end to celebrate their family. The only study that used anything other than interviewing and standardized tests was Asten's (1997), in which she employed the use of film in her ethnographic research. Thus the work of this project is truly unique in the literature. In total I read over 250 articles on lesbians and on lesbian-led families, but

was unable to find any research with a similar focus and population as I used in this study.

What Does the Academic Literature on Families Offer to the Study of Planned Two-Mother Families?

Planned two-mother families differ from other types of lesbian-led families in that they have not experienced the stress of divorce, reorganization, coming out, and sometimes step parenting. When a researcher focuses on planned two-mother families, it could be argued that there is a reduction in the number of extraneous variables (such as those named above) that could account for how these families function and how the children are developing. Studies focusing on planned two-mother families can be used to best make the case for how children will function in lesbian-led families. Few published studies have focused exclusively on planned two-mother families who have conceived a child together. To date I have been able to locate only the following studies that have focused exclusively on these families: Almack (2005), Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, and Sandfort (2004), Brewaeys et al (1997), Chan, Brooks, et al. (1998), Chan, Raboy, and Patterson (1998), Falks et al. (1995), Gartrell et al. (1996), Gartrell et al. (1999), and Gartrell et al. (2000). Of the more recent studies, Bos et al. used a subsample of a larger comparative study in which planned two-mother families were compared to heterosexual-led two-parent families. They looked at the relationship between minority stress, the experience of parenthood, and child adjustment in planned two-mother families and found that most families did not experience minority stress. But in those who did, the mothers felt a need to justify their parenting, and the children experienced more behavioural problems. Their study said nothing about whether they perceived themselves

as families. Gartrell et al. (1996), Gartrell et al. (1999), and Gartrell et al. (2000) have been involved in a longitudinal study of planned lesbian families, some of whom were headed by two mothers and others by single parents. Thus far they have produced three papers in which they discuss the results of their work. This large-scale mixed-method study followed the children as they grew, and each member of the family was asked to be involved in the research, although not together as a family. Interestingly, all of the studies discussed in this paragraph used large populations and quantitative or mixed methods to collect their data. I was unable to locate any qualitative studies that focused exclusively on planned two-mother families.

In summary, an exhaustive search of a number of databases yielded very little research on planned two-mother families. I was not able to find any qualitative research on planned two-mother families, nor on the broader category of lesbian-led families, in which they participated in the interview together. Although we now know much more about children raised in lesbian-led families, we still know little about the relationships within these families, and we know even less about the relationships and interactions within planned two-mother families. More specifically, these studies have not illuminated characteristics that may be unique about planned two-mother families.

Lesbian Couples Who Conceive a Child Together

The presence or arrival of children alters the dynamics of any couple's relationship. Many planned two-mother families described experiencing as much discrimination from the lesbian and gay community regarding their choice to parent as they did from the larger society. In addition, the choice to become pregnant or to parent often renders a lesbian's identity invisible, because most of society sees the concept of

lesbian mothering as an oxymoron (Lewin, 2001). Both of these problems create considerable stress in a lesbian couple's relationship. There are many issues for people surrounding the formation of a family and having children, but for lesbians there is an added series of stressors because of the stigmatization of lesbians and lesbian parents, which is even greater if the lesbian is non-White, disabled, or otherwise marginalized by characteristics, because she is then doubly or triply marginalized by society.

It is important for researchers to remember that all families are highly diverse in their origins, structure, and functioning, including planned two-mother families. This is essential to the understanding and researching of lesbian-led families. All too often all lesbian-led families are grouped together and their diversity is ignored, as though being a lesbian means that one shares a large number of unifying properties with other lesbians and their families. Lesbian-led families can no more be grouped into one category than can all Black families or heterosexual-led families, because homogeneity does not exist among families merely because of one characteristic.

The choice of whether or not to parent and how to become a parent is a much greater issue for lesbian couples than it is for heterosexual couples. For the majority of heterosexual couples, choosing to conceive a child is just another step in their relationship, whereas for a lesbian couple this often is probably a long-thought-out decision. Lesbian couples must decide how they will have a child; who, if either, will carry the pregnancy; how they will go about becoming pregnant; what role the social mother will have; and how 'out' they will be in the process. Many of these issues are extremely conflictual, and the mere discussion of how, who, and when to parent can often break up the couple.

The Forest in Which We Live as Lesbians Trying to Create Families

In order to thrive rather than just survive as a lesbian couple and family, it is necessary to have a number of personal and community assets. Couples and families must receive support from one another, from extended family, and from society at large to function well. In addition, couples must be able to negotiate an intimacy level that is comfortable for both members and allows for both cohesion and flexibility (Olsen, 1993). This issue is more difficult for lesbian couples because support for their relationship from the broader community can be lacking. In many ways lesbian couples function similarly to heterosexual couples, but have added stressors related to being part of a marginalized group that is not fully recognized as a couple within society. On the positive side, lesbian couples lack the society-prescribed gender roles that are expected in a relationship, and therefore they are able to create roles that are comfortable for each individual.

One does not have to look too far back in history to find the virtual absence in policy and law of lesbian-led families and lesbian issues. There were two major events in 1969, one in the US and one in Canada, which signalled the dawning of a new era. The first occurred in Canada during the Trudeau era with the passing of Bill C-150, which stated that the government had no business in the bedrooms of the nation (EGALE, 2000). Bill C-150 opened up individuals' abilities to live a comfortable lifestyle. The second was the 1969 Stonewall Riot in New York City (EGALE, 2000), which was one of the first large uprisings in the gay and lesbian community against the discrimination and harassment that the community was experiencing at the hands of the police and society at large. These two events signalled the consideration of legal rights for lesbians,

the lifting of the invisibility veil of the community, and the beginning of the politicization of the lesbian and gay community. The fight for equal rights was beginning.

A third major milestone for the formation of lesbian-led families was the 1973 decision by the American Psychological Association to remove homosexuality as a mental illness from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (Shore, 1996). This paved the way for lesbians to be able to fight for custody of their children and not to be discriminated against on the basis of having a mental illness; namely, homosexuality. In the publication *Outlaws and Inlaws: Your Guide to LGBT Rights, Same-Sex Relationships and Canadian Law*, Fisher (2004) reminded the reader that gays and lesbians have been "systematically excluded from numerous federal, provincial and territorial statutes in areas such as family, immigration, tax, pension and succession law" (p. 2-2) and that "our contributions to history and Canadian society have been obscured through the erasure of historical references to lesbianism" (p. 2-3).

It took until the late 1990s, approximately 30 years after the passing of Bill C-150, for cases involving lesbians and gays to get to the Canadian Supreme Court (EGALE, 2000), thereby signalling the beginning in the changes of laws to recognize lesbian and gay rights. Although Section 15(1) of the 1985 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protected against the discrimination of many groups in Canadian society, it was not until 1996, after the Supreme Court in Canada ruled on the *Egan and Nesbitt v. Canada* case, that sexual orientation became a protected category under the Charter (MacDougall, 2000). Today all provinces except Alberta have specific legislation on the books that prevents discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (EGALE, 2000). Subsequently,

other rulings led the federal and provincial governments to begin to make further changes.

Rulings in favour of lesbians and their families were even later in coming. During the 1970's and 1980's there were a number of rulings against women who conceived children in heterosexual marriages, then subsequently came out as a lesbian (Fisher, 2004). In these cases women lost custody of their children because the courts feared that children raised by a lesbian mother would suffer due to the absence of a 'father figure'. In one case a judge agreed not to take custody from a mother if she agreed to stop living with her lesbian partner. Since she did not stop co-habiting she lost custody of her daughter, pointing to the fact that if a mother agreed to be closeted or invisible, she could keep custody of her children (Fisher). In other cases lesbian mothers were allowed visitation rights to their children, but not allowed overnight visits (Fisher). During 1997 in Alberta, the Ms. T. case received a significant amount of public attention. Ms. T had been a foster parent for 17 years when her heterosexual marriage broke up and her lesbian partner moved in. When Social Services in Alberta became aware of the relationship the children were removed from the home and the Alberta Social Services Minister Dr. Lyle Oberg affirmed that Alberta's foster-care policy stated that no children will be placed in a home of a *practicing* lesbian (LifeSiteNews, 1997). Although it is now possible for lesbians be foster parents in Alberta, they are still not able to adopt through Children's Services (previously Social Services) in the province.

Finally in the late 1990s court rulings began to be seen that favoured lesbian mothers and families. A 1999 ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of *M v. H.* stated that the Province of Ontario's Family Law Act excluded same-sex partners.

This in turn led to the June 2000 passing of Bill C-23 in Canada to modernize the benefits and obligations of those in same-sex relationships. Bill C-23 gave homosexual relationships the same status as heterosexual common-law relationships. Then on July 19, 2005, the Canadian Senate gave royal assent to Bill C-38, which provides equal access for all Canadians, including gays and lesbian, to civil marriages (DJC, 2005).

Although these changes were happening in other jurisdictions of Canada, the situation in Alberta had changed very little until the late 1990s. The Supreme Court of Canada's 1998 decision on the Vriend case started the changes in Alberta. This case began in 1991 when Delwin Vriend was fired from his job as a laboratory instructor at a private Christian college in Edmonton because his sexual orientation violated the religious policy of the institution. At that time the Alberta Human Rights law provided no protection on the basis of sexual orientation, and the government refused to extend this protection even though the case was before the courts. It took until April 2, 1998, when the Supreme Court of Canada invoked Section 15(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for the province of Alberta to extend human rights protection to same-sex individuals (Lahey, 1999). Unfortunately it is still the case that today this protection is only 'read in' and not explicitly written into the Alberta Human Rights legislation. After this ruling the laws and policies in Alberta began to change, albeit slowly, and often not until someone took a complaint to the Human Rights Commission.

Even though these policies and laws exist, the policy (both written and unwritten) of discrimination against lesbians and gays in the area of pregnancy and adoption has continued through the 1990s and into the new millennium. Although a lesbian couple, like a heterosexual couple, who chooses to have a child by procreation or adoption has

made the decision to parent together, the social mother often lacks any legal rights to parent the child. In some provinces, including Alberta, policy and law now exist for a social mother to legally adopt the child without the birth mother losing her parental rights (EGALE, 2000), but this process is both time consuming and costly.

A decade ago artificial insemination (AI) for lesbians in Canada was very difficult to access. Many of the larger fertility clinics in Canada still had policies (albeit often unwritten) that prevented lesbians from being clients of the clinics. Many clinics limited their practice to 'happily married' heterosexual couples who had tried unsuccessfully for over a year to get pregnant (Werner, 2002). Other clinics required that lesbian couples undergo rigorous psychological screening before being accepted into the program (Arnup, 1995). Many lesbians refused such screening because they felt that it was just another hoop through which they had to jump on the road to ultimately being rejected as not suitable for the program. A decade ago few sperm banks in Canada were openly willing to supply sperm to lesbian couples. Still today the bulk of sperm banks do not clearly state on their web page or in their promotional material that they are open to lesbians' accessing their services (Hilborn, n.d.). Thankfully, access to fertility clinics in Canada has been improving. In court an employee of the Genesis Fertility Clinic in Vancouver stated that in the previous year 15%-20% of assisted inseminations involved same-sex couples (BC Human Rights Tribunal, 2001). Yet, less than a decade previously the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons backed the policy right of the only physician with the only frozen-sperm bank in BC to refuse AI services to a lesbian couple on the basis that the service was 'neither urgent nor emergent' (Werner, 2002). This is not surprising since the report entitled *Donor Insemination: An Overview* found that 76% of

Canadian physicians surveyed said that they would refuse to inseminate a woman in a same-sex relationship (Achilles, 1992). These results were identical to those of Freeman, Taylor, Wonnacott, and Brown's 1987 study in which they asked 39 AI practitioners whether they would accept lesbians for AI. Only 8% said that they were willing to inseminate a woman who identified herself as a lesbian, 16% were unsure whether they would provide AI services, and 76% would reject a lesbian outright. These discriminatory findings were not significantly affected by the form of medical practice, the number of applicants seen in a year, or whether a lesbian had ever requested AI services from them or their clinic (Freeman et al., 1987). The results point out that the physicians were making important moral, social, and ethical judgments even though there was no research evidence that lesbians made bad parents.

In an article that examined issues regarding AI for lesbian couples, Barwin (1993) stated that physicians are obligated "to follow the same guidelines as in the case of a heterosexual couple requesting therapeutic donor insemination [TDI] and that if a physician has ethical, legal or personal reasons for refusing to carry out TDI, . . . the physician's obligation would be to refer the woman to another physician" (p. 177). Yet it was still true in 2001 that in Quebec the policy was that lesbians still did not have access to either private or public fertility clinics (Werner, 2002). Today, as a result of the passing of Bill 84 in Quebec on June 8, 2002—the bill that extended equal rights to same-sex couples in the province for all medical and social services—Quebec has some of the best access for lesbians to become parents through pregnancy or adoption. As a result of the past discriminatory policies that have existed in various provinces in Canada, many lesbian women have resorted to alternative methods of achieving pregnancy. These

have included finding a male to donate sperm and self-inseminating, having a one-night stand, having a male friend masquerade as a heterosexual spouse at a fertility clinic, telling a physician that she is a single heterosexual woman whose biological clock is running out, or becoming involved in what has been termed 'reproductive tourism'—travelling to a destination in Canada or the US that has more liberal access to AI for the sole purpose of becoming pregnant.

The formation and continuance of lesbian families has become easier over the last few years, but there are still major challenges to achieving pregnancy in a lesbian relationship. The medical profession is becoming more aware and sensitive than a decade ago to the often unique needs of lesbians and their families. The heteronormative attitudes will not change overnight, but as Canadians become more informed about planned two-mother families, I hope that the homophobia and heterosexism that currently exist and interfere with planned two-mother families will decrease.

Because families and relationships are gendered constructs and the models have been designed through research on male-female couples, who interact differently from female-female couples, any of these models should be applied to lesbian-led families with great caution. For example, Olson (1993) discussed concepts such as *enmeshment* and *flexibility* and explained that the more flexible and the less enmeshed (but still connected) a family is, the higher the family functions. The problem with applying these concepts to planned two-mother families is that because of the pervading heteronormativity in society today, many planned two-mother families must have higher levels of enmeshment and lower levels of flexibility to thrive as a family and protect themselves from external assaults. Studies have shown that lesbian couples have higher

levels of fusion (or enmeshment) in their relationships than heterosexual couples have (Kreston & Besko, 1980). In the past this was taken as a sign of dysfunction, abnormality, or unhealthy patterns in the relationship (Kreston & Besko, 1980). Newer research has shown that this fusion is actually healthy and not harmful to the relationship (Laird, 2000). Mencher (1990; as cited in Laird, 2000) suggested that the "very processes that in lesbian couples have been termed fusion . . . are in fact what lesbians themselves cite as special about their relationships and the levels of intimacy achieved" (p. 462).

Do We Know How Many Lesbian-Led Couples and Families There Are in Canada?

There is limited Canadian demographic knowledge about lesbian-led families and, more specifically, planned two-mother families. For the first time the Canadian census collected information about same-sex families in 2001, but few families identified themselves as being a same-sex family (Census 2001, 2004). In total, 30,400 lesbians identified themselves as being in a couple. Overall, only 0.5% of the couples identified on the census were in a same-sex relationship. Only 2,525 couples in Alberta identified themselves as being in a same-sex relationship, but Census Canada did not give a gender breakdown of this number. Of the 15,200 lesbian-identified couples, only 15% stated that they had children living with them. Even Statistics Canada has admitted that these numbers are most likely a gross underestimate of the total number of same-sex couples in Canada; therefore it is difficult to use information from this sample as the basis of a study of same-sex families. Since 2000 same-sex couples have been expected to file their income tax as a couple. But just as is the case with the census data, only a minority of same-sex couples and families file this way. This lack of self-disclosure of lesbian couples and families on the census and with Revenue Canada highlights the same issue

that researchers have had for some time in researching this population: Only a very small group of individuals self-identify as being in a lesbian relationship, and thus what we know about lesbian couples and families is severely limited. For this reason it is extremely difficult to discuss issues such as relationship formation, continuance, choice to parent, number of children, socioeconomic status, and so on without basing the findings on a very limited population. Currently, a large-scale national study of same-sex families is being undertaken at the Université du Québec à Montréal by a research team headed by Dr. D. Julien. This study will possibly shed further light on the general characteristics of lesbian-led families.

Droughts and Plagues of Lesbian-Led Families

Planned two-mother families face many of the same concerns and challenges that heterosexual families face in creating family and having children, but they also face a whole series of concerns and challenges that are out of the realm of heterosexual families, such as the social marginalization, invisibility, and stigmatization in society that set them apart from heterosexual families. Laird (2000) implied in her work that planned two-mother families have no relational scripts and no parental or family role models and thus are left to invent themselves and their family culture in isolation. However, planned two-mother families, because they can live outside the patriarchal assumptions of how families function, have the opportunity to create roles within the parental dyad and families that work well for them. Thus these more egalitarian parental dyads have the ability to offer positive parenting role models to other types of families, including heterosexual families (Morningstar, 1999).

Until recently, most lesbians had their children before they entered a lesbian relationship, and the majority of the research studies on lesbian-led families and lesbian parenthood compared these families with two-parent heterosexual-led families and families headed by single heterosexual women (Dalton & Bielbey, 2000; Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 1997; Nelson, 1996, 1999; Patterson, 1992, 1995; Tasker, 1999). Much of this research on lesbians who conceived before coming out has focused on discovering whether these new lesbian-led families are as competent at raising children as heterosexual-led families are.

Much of the early research on lesbian-led families was fraught with difficulties. For example, until recently, lesbian mothers risked their jobs, homes, and custody of their children if they went public about their sexual orientation. Given that even today the majority of children being raised in lesbian-led families were conceived in previous heterosexual unions, women often lived in fear of public disclosure of their orientation. This in turn prevented lesbians and their families from volunteering to take part in research. Even today some authors (e.g., Haimes & Weiner, 2000) have still felt that advertising for a sample and collecting data must be done with great care and absolute assurances of anonymity for fear of repercussions.

The term *normal*, although used in many studies on children raised in lesbian-led households to describe societal or culturally appropriate gender roles, identity, and/or behaviour, is problematic because it means different things to different people depending on the subjective lens through which they are viewing things. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, language often constrains or limits a researcher's ability to correctly describe a concept. Walsh (1993) summarized four major perspectives from which normality can

be viewed. This list is not exhaustive, but it does help to illuminate the issue surrounding describing normality. Normality can be viewed as healthy or having an absence of pathology, it can be viewed as average or statistically the norm, it can be viewed as utopia—the ideal or optimal level of functioning—and it can be viewed as a process that examines an individual's development over time in the context of "transactional systems dependent on an interaction of biopsychological variables" (p. 5). All of these perspectives of normality have been applied in past studies to describe children in lesbian-led families, thus confounding what is really meant by normalcy.

The issue of family for lesbians is also one of status. There is little question that when a heterosexual woman gives birth or adopts a child she has achieved the status of mother and that, by virtue of being a mother, she and those in her grouping become a family, if they did not see themselves that way before. Lesbians, on the other hand, do not have the same ease of becoming mothers or a family. Society does not automatically consider the female partner of a woman with a child a mother; nor does it see the whole constellation as a family.

In addition, lesbian-led families "are specifically excluded from consideration in forming views of 'normal family functioning' and from the rituals used to emphasize successful family life" (Slater & Mencher, 1991, p. 373). According to researchers, including Slater and Mencher, the normal progression through the various stages of the life cycle, which generally occurs via rituals, is completely unavailable to planned two-mother families. Only individual rituals such as birthdays, new jobs, and retirements are left. Currently, the issue of same-sex marriage in Canada is receiving a great deal of attention. On July 19, 2005, Canada became the fourth country to legalize same-sex

marriage (DJC, 2005), but the province of Alberta is still debating how it will handle the issue of the requirement that marriage commissioners conduct same-sex marriages (Markusoff, 2005). Thus, in provinces such as Alberta, problems with the lack of recognition of same-sex relationships and families continue. This past lack of societal recognition of life-course rituals such as marriage and anniversaries has further marginalized lesbian-led families and set them apart from the larger society.

Last, it is important to give lesbian-led families the opportunity to tell their stories. It is through telling their stories that lesbians and their families can begin to recognize their strengths and celebrate their families. Laird (2000) believed that there is a crucial connection between a couple's or a family's troubles and social narratives that disqualify, marginalize, delegitimize, trivialize, and demean them. Thus, it is important as a researcher not only to be cognizant of the language used, but also to give members of lesbian-led families the opportunity to tell their stories in their own words, thereby empowering them and legitimizing their families.

Optimal Growth Conditions for Lesbian-Led Families

Although researchers have often not limited their investigation to a specific subgroup of lesbian-led families, the results have been consistently positive regardless of the demographics or where or when they were carried out. Happily, this research has told us that children being raised in lesbian-led families have developed culturally 'normal' gender identities (Golombok et al., 1997; Patterson, 1992), gender roles (Golombok et al., 1997; Patterson, 1992), and peer relationships (Patterson, 1992; Tasker, 1999); have 'normal' play narratives (Perry et al., 2004); and have exhibited culturally 'normal' emotional/behavioural development (Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Patterson, 1992). This is

all-important information to use as background in exploring planned two-mother families, but the results may not be the same for these families.

Even with the constraint of having multiple definitions of normalcy, past research has shown a high level of consistency in the findings. When researchers compared children from heterosexual-led two-parent or single-parent families with children from lesbian-led families, they reported that children from lesbian-led families experienced greater warmth and were more securely attached in their families (Tasker & Golombok, 1997) and saw themselves (and were seen by others) as more loveable and affectionate and less aggressive (Patterson, 1992). In addition, the nonbiological parent in lesbian-led families was significantly more involved in all aspects of parenting than the biological father was in the heterosexual family (Brewaeys & van Hall, 1997). Mooney-Somers and Golombok (2000) discussed the interesting finding that the literature over the past 20 years has shown that lesbian mothers work hard to make sure that their children are exposed to positive male role models. In addition, Golombok et al. (1997) found that children who had experienced a divorce were significantly more likely to have contact with their biological father if their mother had come out as a lesbian than if she was heterosexual. Although some researchers found that lesbian-led families and/or children were not functioning as well as those in intact heterosexual-led families, further research showed that this was a result of a previous stressful heterosexual divorce and not of being raised in lesbian-led families (Patterson, 1995).

When researchers compared lesbian stepmothers to lesbian social mothers, they found that lesbian social mothers shared much more equally in the parenting of the

children than stepmothers did and were more recognized as parents of the children by the birth mothers and the extended family (Dalton & Bielbey, 2000; Nelson, 1999).

These findings point out that there are clear differences between the various types of lesbian mothers and lesbian-led families and that to group them together, assuming homogeneity, clearly introduces error and bias into the results. Perry et al. (2004) felt that this was a large enough issue that they listed it as a limitation of their study. If the various types of lesbian-led families were divided, possibly the differences in functioning and strength between heterosexual-led families and some types of lesbian-led families (such as planned two-mother families) would be more striking. In addition, it would be interesting to know whether the differences would be even more striking today in Canada because many social mothers are now in a position of being not only a legal guardian of the child, but also a legal parent.

In summary, the review of the literature on lesbians, lesbian parenting, children raised in lesbian-headed households, and lesbian-led families (e.g., Brewaeys, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1999; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 1992; Tasker, 1999) has almost unanimously revealed that lesbians and their families function as effectively as, if not better than, heterosexual-led families. This point was clearly demonstrated in Stacey and Biblarz's 2001 research in which they did a meta-analysis of 21 studies on lesbian-led families. They found that there *are* differences between lesbian- and gay-led families compared to heterosexual-led families and that virtually all of these differences point to the superior functioning of children raised in lesbian- and gay-led families. Factors such as the ability to care for, love, and support a child are more important than a parent's sexual orientation. Stacey and Biblarz do say that children raised by gay or lesbian parents are

more likely to experiment with same gender relationships and they allude to this being problematic. In a heteronormative world this could be seen as problematic, but it is my belief that attitudes and values are and have shifted significantly, even since the writing of this article, and their argument of this being problematic is no longer as sound as it was five years ago. Given these findings, I believe that it is no longer necessary to focus on and conduct studies with comparative samples of heterosexual parents and families to confirm that lesbian-led families are competent at raising children and being families. This is one of the reasons that I have chosen to focus exclusively on one type of lesbian-led family and explore that family type in more depth.

Limitations of Past Research

Many researchers have identified a number of limitations to the existing research. First, very little research on lesbian-led families has been done in Canada. The exceptions to this are Arnup (1995, 1999), Nelson (1996, 1999), Dundas and Kaufman (2000), and Luce (2004). In addition, the bulk of the research still does not distinguish between the various forms of lesbian-led families—such as those with children conceived before coming out versus after. Last, most of the studies have been conducted using small convenience samples of lesbians who are White, middle- to upper-class, well-educated, urban, out, nonaddicted, and socially well-connected lesbians who live in North America, Britain, or Europe (Parks, 1998). These demographics clearly omit the bulk of lesbian-led families, and thus the ability to generalize these findings to lesbian-led families in Canada is extremely limited. In terms of research on planned two-mother families, because of limited access in the past to alternative insemination, these types of families generally have children who are only preschool or elementary-school age; hence there is very

limited research on families with adolescent or adult-aged children. Finally, many of the researchers have limited their studies on lesbian-led families to only a part of the family, such as family of choice or family of origin; few studies have looked at families as multigenerational. Because past studies have focused only on parts of the family and have been limited to analyzing a maximum of two generations, this has left a void in the research literature on how whole families function together. This study, although not multigenerational, involved interviewing whole, planned, lesbian-led families.

Much of the past research has focused on individuals in lesbian-led families, not on the families themselves, but moving to the family as a system of interest fosters a better understanding of the ways in which families function and garner support from the wider community and the strains that they experience as they forge their paths through an often unwelcoming society. One of the critical issues regarding lesbian-led family research is that there are *no* large-scale random studies on family life that have included this population in enough numbers to be able to comment on lesbian-led families, let alone planned two-mother families. The studies that have been done with these families often have many sampling issues, including the lack of representativeness of the families studied, because virtually every study has used participants who are self-selected. Little if anything is known about lesbian-led families who are not middle class, well educated, and White.

With regard to the subset of planned two-mother families, the little research that has been done with this population is also said to be fraught with the same sampling issues. But I believe this may not be the case. The difference here is that the demographics of the sample—White, well-educated, middle-class, out, nonaddicted, and

urban—may actually be representative of the population of lesbian couples who have conceived children together because, in order to have the choice to parent as a planned two-mother family, the couple must have the opportunity to access the necessary services to achieve a pregnancy, which has been limited by demographic and geographic criteria. The reason for this is that in Alberta, and in many cases right across Canada, access to insemination for lesbians through fertility clinics is still very limited and is thus out of reach for those who do not meet a very specific set of criteria. These criteria for access to the fertility clinics are for the most part the same as the demographics of the past studies on lesbian-led families; therefore perhaps the studies on planned two-mother families are actually representative of those in that population.

Summary

In summary, there is not one definition of *The Family*, but many. The definitions can, and should, include lesbian-led families—with and without children conceived and adopted in a variety of ways. Past literature on the family has offered little to Canadian lesbian-led families because very few studies have been published, and even less research has been done with planned two-mother families. Many of the studies that do exist on lesbian-led families were not conducted in Canada, were carried out at a time when lesbian-led families had even less recognition or protection under the laws and policies of the land than they do today, and were comparative research studies that often viewed lesbian-led families as 'less than' other families.

A review of the literature showed that much of the past research on lesbian-led families has not involved collecting rich descriptive data on these families; when descriptive data have been collected, the various types of lesbian-led families have been

grouped together, and most of the interviews have been with individual family members, not the family as a whole. No Canadian studies have looked exclusively at planned two-mother families, nor have they involved interviewing the whole lesbian-led family together. In addition, most studies have been limited to the collection of data through interviews or standardized testing, and extremely few have involved other methods of data collection such as drawing or other kinetic activities. Even with all of these limitations, past research has clearly demonstrated that lesbian-led families function as well as, or better than, heterosexual families and that they have valuable stories to tell of their successes and failures in forming and continuing to be families in a less than ideal environment. For this reason I chose to focus on interviewing the entire planned two-mother family together to explore in depth what family meant to them and to have them draw their family as a technique to begin and end the conversation. This study is a qualitative study whose purpose is to add to the literature on planned two-mother families by increasing the knowledge about how small a number of families living in one city in a conservative province in Canada view themselves within a context that can be described as oppressive for many lesbians and their families.

INTERTEXT 3: ANCIENT IMAGES OF TREES

All cultures have myths and stories about trees. For example, one need not look past the first book of the Bible to find the importance of trees in the lives of humans. Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden because they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree. The following are other examples of some of those stories.

> Trees have from time immemorial been closely associated with magic. These stout members of the vegetable kingdom may stand for as long as a thousand years, and tower far above our mortal heads. As such they are symbols and keepers of unlimited power, longevity, and timelessness. An untouched forest, studded with trees of all ages, sizes and types, is more than a mysterious, magical place—it is one of the energy reservoirs of nature. Within its boundaries stand ancient and new sentinels, guardians of the universal force which has manifested on the Earth. (Cunningham, 1996; as cited in Garofalo, 2003, ¶ 7)

> From the earliest times, trees have been the focus of religious life for many peoples around the world. As the largest plant on earth, the tree has been a major source of stimulation to the mythic imagination. Trees have been invested in all cultures with a dignity unique to their own nature, and tree cults, in which a single tree or a grove of trees is worshipped, have flourished at different times almost everywhere. Even today there are sacred woods in India and Japan, just as there were in pre-Christian Europe. An elaborate mythology of trees exists across a broad range of ancient cultures. (Witcombe; as cited in Garofalo, 2003, ¶ 16)

> Larger and finer meanings are read into the older legends of the plants, and the universality of certain myths is expressed in the concurrence of ideas in the beginnings of the great religions. One of the first figures in the leading cosmologies is a tree of life that is guarded by a serpent. In the Judaic faith this was the tree in the Garden of Eden; the Scandinavians made it an ash, *Ygdrasil*; Christians usually specify the tree as an *apple*, Hindus as a *soma*, Persians as a *homa*, and Cambodians as a *talok*. This early tree is the vine of Bacchus, the snake-entwined caduceus of Mercury, the twining creeper of the Eddas, the bohidruma of Buddha, the fig of Isaiah, the tree of Aesculapius with the serpent around his trunk. (Skinner, 1911; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 37)

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING A STRONG TRUNK: I: USING A MULTIPERSPECTIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO INFORM THE METHOD

> Approaching a tree we approach a sacred being who can teach us about love and about endless giving. She is one of millions of beings who provide our air, our homes, our fuel, our books. Working with the spirit of the tree can bring us renewed energy, powerful inspiration, deep communion. (Druid Tree Lore; Garofalo, 2003, ¶ 28)

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks—human ecological theory and standpoint theory (more specifically, lesbian feminist standpoint theory)—were used to guide this research. Both can be described as counter-ideological and positional theories that help to frame the research and increase the understanding of new or emerging constructs. Because some researchers (e.g., White & Klein, 2002) believe that these theories are not really theories, but are lenses that can be used to frame the research, I have used them in combination to further crystallize the data and interpret of the findings. These frameworks were used primarily as lenses through which to view the results because the method of heuristic inquiry dictates how the research is carried out. The following are the key concepts from each of the theories and a discussion of how they overlap or create tension between them.

Human Ecological Theory

Human ecology is about the interdependence of human actions and environmental qualities, with an interest in viewing phenomena from holistic and systems perspectives

(Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). Key to human ecological theory are the concepts of humans, their environments, and the interactions between them (Westney, Brabble, & Edwards, 1988). Human ecological theory also states that changing one part of an ecological system usually affects and changes the whole system or other settings. Human ecology and human ecological theory are relatively new areas of study and are the result of a combination of other disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, anthropology, and social work) that have included work with the family. Last, human ecological theory has not developed one uniform and consensual set of theoretical propositions (White & Klein, 2002). This is why some see it as a framework and not a theory.

Bronfenbrenner (1979; as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1994) presented one of the most detailed models of the structure of the human ecological framework when he described it as "a set of nested structures, each inside the other" (p. 1645; see Figure 1). Briefly, in using an ecological perspective, the individual is generally seen as the ontological level, around which all the other systems are nested. Although Bronfenbrenner (1984) discussed the ontological or individual level, it is often not on the diagrams of his work and is frequently not discussed as part of the nested four concentric circles that make up his depiction of the human ecological model. Thus, the ontological level will not be included when discussing the nested concentric circle framework of human ecological theory, although it has been positioned in Figure 1. The microsystem is typically viewed as the most inner circle and is seen as the level in which the family operates. The mesosystem can be seen as the level that is composed of the linkages or relationships between two or more microsystems within which each individual in each family operates. The exosystem is the system of mesosystems and microsystems; it

contains both formal and informal systems. In this part of the model is found the settings, groups, organizations, and communities that influence individuals and their immediate systems. Macrosystems can be envisaged as the blueprint for a culture or subculture within a society. It is the

> overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, pp. 1645-1646)

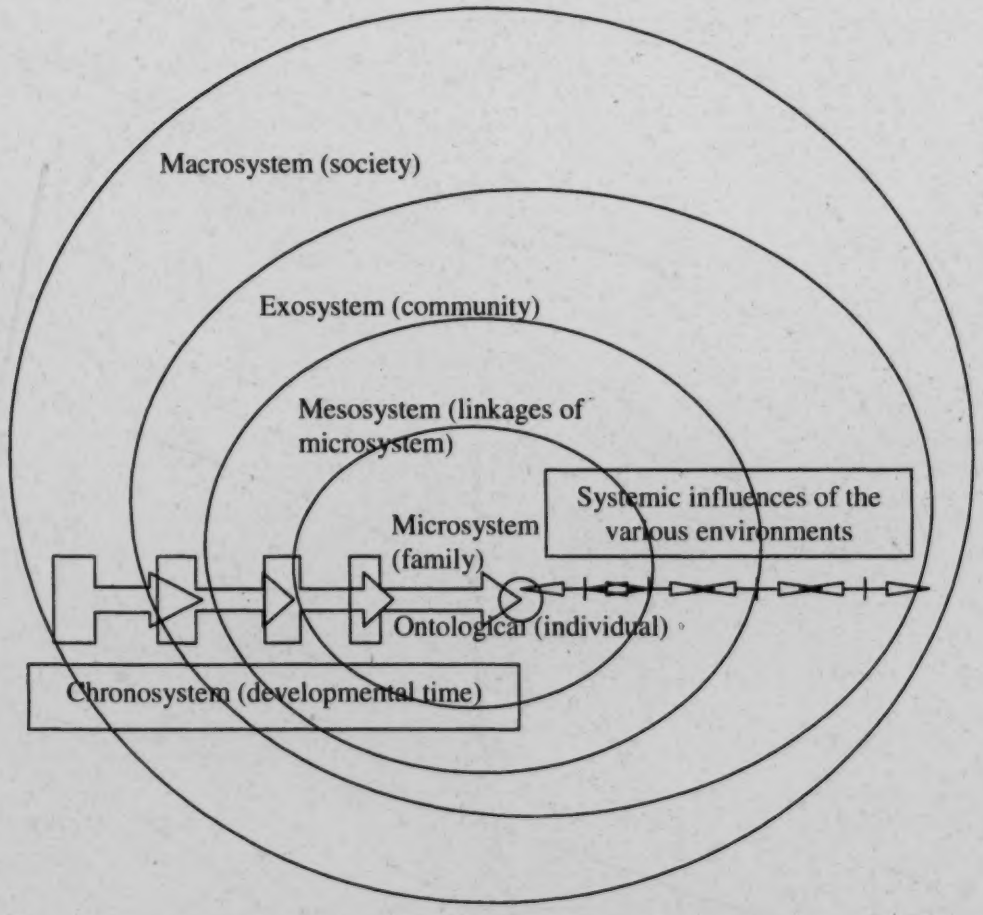


Figure 1. Human ecological system (adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), in addition to the systems of the four concentric circles discussed above is the chronosystem. The chronosystem cuts across the other four systems by including the concept of time with regard to the attributes of the person and her or his environment. This is often referred to as *developmental time*. When this framework is used in research, it is possible to discuss the results on four levels over time. This can be especially helpful in studying a construct that has changed over time, such as societal reactions to homosexuality and families headed by lesbians. For example, one can look at how Canadian and provincial family laws and policies (macrosystem) impact planned two-mother families (microsystem) who access Alberta's health care system and hospitals (exosystem) and how each person in the family is impacted by specific policies (the ontological level) during the last two decades (chronosystem). In this particular study I use human ecological theory to look at what family (microsystem) meant to individuals (ontological level) in planned two-mother families at this particular time (chronosystem). Family members were also given the opportunity to reflect back (chronosystem) on their family stories and discuss their family experiences (as told through their stories) with regard to their immediate family (microsystem), their extended family and other microsystems into which the family is linked (mesosystem), their community (exosystem), and society at large (macrosystem).

Bronfenbrenner (1995) also discussed three life-course perspectives in relation to human ecological theory: (a) An individual's developmental life course is heavily shaped and influenced by the historical period in which she or he lives, (b) a major factor that influences an individual's successful transition through her or his life course is whether she or he is able to meet these milestones on time, and (c) the lives of all family members

are interdependent. Hence, how one family member reacts to a particular event affects the developmental course of other family members. These concepts can also be applied in the example above.

Human ecological theory has a strong process orientation that allows researchers to focus on questions that often cannot be addressed with more limited theories (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). The hallmark strength of this theory is its ability to allow for the examination of interactions between system levels; in the case of my research on planned two-mother families, it was the interaction between various levels of the model and how these interactions were interpreted by individuals and their families.

Family ecological theory is a variation of ecological theory that focuses on the family as the unit of analysis, not the individual. "Family theories are ways of looking at and rationally explaining phenomena related to the family" (Eshleman & Wilson, 2001, p. 8). A family concept is a "miniature system of meaning, that is, a symbol, such as a word or phrase, which enables a phenomenon to be perceived in a certain way. Concepts are tools by which one can share meanings" (p. 8). "Families are not easy units of analysis; . . . they are complex, dynamic, messy, ever-changing systems" (Bogenschneider, 2002, p. xvii). In addition, "families cannot be understood apart from other systems of male power, nor are families unitary wholes" (Eshleman & Wilson, 2001, p. 27). The concept of being able to study the family over time within the context of its environments and how it interacts within its environments to produce outcomes is the hallmark of family ecological theory. This is the variation of human ecological theory that was used in this study.

Lesbian Feminist Standpoint Theory

The following is a discussion of standpoint theory in general and then feminist and lesbian feminist standpoint theory specifically. In terms of standpoint theories in general, Denzin (1997) stated that they share three overarching commitments: (a) Research must be undertaken from the point of view of the historically and culturally situated individual, (b) researchers will continue to work outward from their own biographies to the worlds of experience that surround them, and (c) all standpoint theories share the desire to produce inquiry that will speak clearly and powerfully about the experiences of the marginalized. Standpoint theory "makes the everyday experiences of marginality a ground for theory building" (Gamson, 2003, p. 547). "That is, what is seen or experienced as authentic and real depends upon one's standpoint, one's perspective" (Litton Fox & McBride Murry, 2000, p. 1163).

Polk said that "feminism refers to the discourses which analyze and develop theories which are concerned with how and why women are different, oppressed, and/or subjugated group within a society" (p. 22). Feminist theory, then, is about women's experiences and their many voices. Feminist theory is a theory rooted in the emancipation of women. Feminist theory recognizes that both family and gender are social constructions that need to be accounted for in doing research. When an interview is conducted from a feminist standpoint, it is more like a conversation between equals in which information unfolds through the dialogue of the stories told. Questions can often be seen as circular in nature, which leads the researcher and those researched into a conversation to uncover the experiences.

Like feminist standpoint theory, lesbian feminist standpoint theory (or lesbian standpoint theory) brings into view issues related to the development of discourses that analyze and develop theories concerned with how and why lesbians are different, oppressed, and/or subjugated within a society. It is a standpoint theory because it "makes the everyday experiences of marginality a ground for theory building" (Gamson, 2003, p. 547). I believe that standpoint theory is especially applicable in working with planned two-mother families because it recognizes the multiple shifting identities of lesbian mothers and planned two-mother families. This point supports Laird's (1993) suggestion that the first priority for studies on lesbian families should be to study them from their own standpoint.

My choice of feminist standpoint theory to frame this study led me to choose to focus specifically on lesbians rather than on lesbians and gay men, because it is my belief that there are inherent differences in how men and women parent. Feminism also led me to choose to include myself as a research participant in the study because I believe that the personal is political and the political is theory; therefore the personal is theoretical, and I then am part of the theory within my research frame. I chose lesbian feminist standpoint theory because it was lesbians on whom the study focused; therefore it was their standpoints that I highlighted. Finally, it was important for me to use both a feminist and a lesbian standpoint to frame this research because the categories of gender and sexual orientation must be seen as distinct from one another, although they are also linked within a feminist ideology.

Tensions Among Theoretical Paradigms and How I Addressed Them

Because both human ecological theory and lesbian feminist standpoint theory lack some of the constructs that many feel are necessary to consider them a theory, using them in combination to fill in some of the missing constructs is helpful. In addition, because planned two-mother families are the unit of analysis of this research, it is important always to remember that all of the results are funnelled through a lesbian feminist family lens. This multitheoretical approach also increases the authenticity of the research. Some scholars might argue, 'but what if both lenses are faulty', but since I believe as a relativistic constructivist that there is not one correct position, this point is not relevant to my work.

The "underlying assumptions of family ecology are consistent with assumptions of a feminist perspective on family theory" (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 428). According to Bubolz and Sontag, both feminist standpoint theory and family ecological theory stress that hermeneutic and critical science perspectives are essential to gain knowledge and lead to change in the family. Family ecology and feminism have in common the recognition of the plurality of family forms, and both take a counter-ideological standpoint and reject the "ideology of 'the family' as a firm, unchanging, historically given entity" (p. 428). The sociohistorical and cultural contexts as well as the environment are acknowledged as playing a part in the problems of individuals and families (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). It is important for a researcher in family ecology to be sensitive to both role ambiguity and the way in which a family defines itself because these constructs help to resolve the uncertainty that might exist in terms of who family members define as part of the family (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993).

Polk (1995) claimed that "Human Ecology has not addressed the importance of male dominance of present day Western cultures" (p. 26). Therefore,

> one of the most important contributions that a feminist perspective can make to human [family] ecology is an acknowledgement of the relevance and importance of women as a category of analysis. Theoretical developments in feminism stress the importance of gender and its role in social organization and human interactions and relationships. A second contribution from a feminist perspective includes a focus upon power relationships that exist between men and women and the importance of these in social organization. (p. 25)

Not everyone in the field shares the view that human ecological theory lacks an appropriate gender lens. Clearly, some feel that the gender ideology, like all other ideologies and social structures, can be handled within the "nested structures" model. "Lastly, feminist approaches are an essential critique of the reductionistic tendencies within some parts of academia to see humans as a homogenous group of individuals" (p. 23).

> One of the most important aspects of an integration of a gender perspective into human[/family] ecology is the addition of a theoretical emphasis on inclusion, by discussing and stressing the importance of the exclusion of certain groups of people from certain areas of society. . . . Human ecological relationships are thus 'gendered' because they are a part of social and ideological systems which are based upon stereotypical and sexist interpretations of biological difference. (p. 26)

Therefore, I believe that human/family ecological theory combined with lesbian feminist standpoint theory is a meaningful lens to use to research families given human/family ecology's broad and inclusive nature and its ability to focus on process and interactions, whereas standpoint theory reminds the researcher that concepts such as culture and language are important. Lesbian feminist standpoint theory complements human/family ecological theory well because the gender-neutral quality of the latter is balanced with feminist theory's focus on gender. Feminist theory points out that gender,

as well as the human/family ecological construct of context, shapes our experiences and our worldview. Feminist theory also focuses on the family and states that family is a central institution in our society but that it is not the monolithic institution that some of the more conservative frameworks make it out to be (White & Klein, 2002).

Given the heterosexism of the majority of the literature on the family, the paucity of research on lesbian-led families, and the unique diversity and complexity of lesbian-led families, some researchers have stated that it is necessary to conduct research on lesbian-led families from a lesbian theoretical standpoint to reveal what is unique, positive, and valuable about these families (Allen & Demo, 1995; Laird, 1999). Standpoint theories that take into account the bicultural nature of planned two-mother families are necessary to capture the diverse, variable, resilient, and thriving natures of planned two-mother families today as well as the issues of these families being challenged or lacking societal supports. The simultaneous involvement in both the lesbian culture and the heterosexual culture can be challenging to negotiate, especially given the fact that the heterosexual world presumes that all children have a mother and father, whereas the lesbian culture often sees those who choose to have children as outcasts. Thus planned two-mother families who must exist within both worlds often walk a fine line between being true to themselves and their families, while still remaining somewhat invisible for the safety of the family. The two most prominent cultures in which planned two-mother families live are the family culture and the lesbian culture, which are often seen as opposed. Planned two-mother families live in a curious dichotomy of being both insiders and outsiders of both cultures all of the time. Two aspects of biculturalism that have been virtually ignored in the literature have been the resiliency and creative

adaptation of planned two-mother families in order to survive and thrive in Canadian society.

Given that no one theory seems adequate to use to study planned two-mother families and that even pairing a broad and inclusive theory with one that privileges the voice of the marginalized, women and lesbians, still does not fully integrate all the necessary components, there may well be a place for the development of a more inclusive family theory than could be used to further study marginalized families. Although this is an intriguing course to follow, it is beyond the scope of this particular study.

Summary

In summary, the theoretical framework that I chose for this study provided the strong roots necessary to tell the family stories. Human/family ecological theory and lesbian-feminist standpoint theory complement one another well. These roots were further strengthened with the choice of heuristic inquiry as the method to guide this research. This method will be discussed in Chapter 4.

INTERTEXT 4: ODE TO A TREE

Along with their mythical qualities, trees also play an important part in providing us with food, shelter, and enjoyment. The following series of quotations speak further to our relationships with trees.

> Time-honored, beautiful, solemn and wise. Noble, sacred and ancient Trees reach the highest heavens and penetrate the deepest secrets of the earth. Trees are the largest living beings on this planet. Trees are in communion with the spiritual and the material. Trees guard the forests and the sanctified places that must not be spoiled. Trees watch over us and provide us with what we need to live on this planet. Trees provide a focal point for meditation, enlightenment, guidance and inspiration. Trees have a soul and a spirit. (Lavenderwater; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 51)

> There are two trees, each yielding its own fruit. One of them is negative. . . . It grows from lack of self-worth and its fruits are fear, anger, envy, bitterness, sorrow—and any other negative emotion. Then there is the tree of positive emotions. Its nutrients include self-forgiveness and a correct self concept. Its fruits are love, joy, acceptance, self-esteem, faith, peace, . . . and other uplifting emotions. (Kathi's Garden; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 44)

> A tree uses what comes its way to nurture itself. By sinking its roots deeply into the earth, by accepting the rain that flows towards it, by reaching out to the sun, the tree perfects its character and becomes great. . . . Absorb, absorb, absorb. That is the secret of the tree. (Deng Ming-Dao; as cited in Garofalo, 2003, ¶ 42)

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING A STRONG TRUNK:

II: THE RESEARCH METHOD

> A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees. (William Blake; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 102)

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods are being used increasingly in the social sciences and arts. The term *qualitative research method* is used to include a wide array of research methods with distinct differences. Generally speaking, qualitative methods are grounded in an interpretivist philosophy because they are concerned with how the "social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced" (Mason, 2002, p. 4). In addition, qualitative methods are generally flexible and sensitive to the social context of the research and based on methods of analysis and explanation building that involve understanding the complexity, detail, and context of the phenomenon (Mason, 2002).

Gamson stated that, "qualitative methods, with their focus on meaning creation and the experiences of everyday life, fit especially well with movement goals of visibility, cultural challenge, and self-determination . . . and the social construction of sexual categories and identities" (p. 542). Qualitative methods that focus on meaning rather than on finding fact or truth are well suited to the study of lesbians because they avoid the historically pathologizing nature of research on lesbians and gays. In addition, qualitative methods are particularly appropriate when there is limited knowledge on the topic or the topic is poorly understood.

The method that is used to engage in research is influenced by one's ontology, epistemology, and research question. From a relativistic constructivist perspective, a method that allows the researcher to study the meaning of a phenomenon fits well.

Heuristic Inquiry

Heuristic inquiry can be seen as a particular form of phenomenology in which the foundational question is, "What is my experience of this phenomena and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomena intensely?" (Patton, 2002, p. 107). Moustakas (1990a, 1990b, 1994) and Douglas and Moustakas (1985) were the principal developers of this phenomenological method and originally called it *heuristic phenomenology* (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). Today the method is more commonly called *heuristic inquiry* (Sela-Smith, 2002). The root meaning of *heuristics* comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means "to discover" or "to find" (Moustakas, 1994). "It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis" (p. 17). The key difference between heuristic inquiry and other forms of phenomenology is that in heuristic inquiry the researcher must have her own in-depth, intense, and passionate experiences of the phenomenon. Without this passionate, personal, in-depth experience with a phenomenon that the researcher is obsessed with investigating, heuristic inquiry cannot be conducted. "At the heart of heuristics lies an emphasis on disclosing the self as a way of facilitating disclosure from others" (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 50) and the "extent to which it legitimizes and places at the fore these personal experiences, reflections, and insights of the researcher" (Patton, 2002,

p. 108). "Self-experience is the single most important guideline in pursuing heuristic research" (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 46).

> It begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. . . . The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon, with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge. (Moustakas, 1990b, p. 9)

Patton believed that

> heuristic research epitomizes the phenomenological emphasis on meanings and knowing through personal experience; it exemplifies and places at the fore the way in which the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry; and it challenges in the extreme traditional scientific concerns about researcher objectivity and detachment. . . . In essence, it personalizes inquiry and puts the experience (and voice) of the inquirer front and center throughout. (p. 109)

One of the distinct features of heuristic inquiry is that the research process is unique to the researcher and the question. This does not mean that it lacks rigorous definitions, careful data collection, or thorough analysis; rather, it means that there is not one prescribed, mechanical method that makes up heuristic inquiry. In addition, the insider knowledge that the researcher has as both participant and researcher is an asset to the study because it enhances the research. This insider involvement is also a hallmark of feminist research. Heuristic inquiry does not involve a formal hypothesis; thus the researcher is free to follow the best path that allows for the disclosure of the true essence of the phenomenon (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). "The objective is not to prove or disprove the influence of one thing or another, but rather to discover the nature of the problem or phenomenon itself and to explicate it as it exists in human experience" (p. 42). "It requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 40). Given that heuristic inquiry is

distinctive from other types of qualitative methods, it allows researchers to do research that could not be done by using another method.

Moustakas (1990b) listed six phases of experience in heuristic inquiry: (a) initial engagement, (b) immersion, (c) incubation, (d) illumination, (e) explication, and (f) creative synthesis. The following is a description of the phases.

Initial engagement. During the initial engagement phase the researcher discovers a question, concern, or issue that holds both personal and social significance and that she or he is called to explore. This phase involves the researcher's engagement in self-dialogue to find an implicit or unspoken awareness that begins the process of rooting out the question for her or him. At the end of this phase the question is fully revealed to the researcher, who then goes through the process of defining and clarifying it.

My journey to define myself and my *family* has been a lifelong process. Through the process of getting pregnant, having my son, and now raising him into puberty, I have often been left without the external validation that the three of us are family. Society has often viewed me as a single mother, and thus I have felt like one at times. This questioning of my family composition and the lack of knowledge regarding other families like mine in Edmonton led me to question how other families like mine saw themselves. Thus, I arrived at my main guiding question, which was "Tell me about your family."

Immersion. Immersion involves the researcher's conscious and unconscious living of the question in "waking, sleeping, and even dream states" (Moustakas, 1990b, p. 28). During this phase it is often said that everything in the researcher's life becomes crystallized around the question, and she or he continues to self-dialogue and self-search in reference to the question. If the topic has been adequately clarified during the previous

stage, "immersion will happen naturally, not through planning or control" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 65).

Once I had decided on my question, I found myself listening even closer to how society described us and watching how we were perceived. Because I wanted my family to participate in the research and I did not want them to know the guiding question in advance, my immersion was very self-reflective and often only discussed with other academics and within the papers that I wrote for my doctoral degree. My question was obviously well clarified as it became obvious to me what it needed to be and that heuristic inquiry was the method to allow me to explore it.

Incubation. Although incubation is the process in which "the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question" (Moustakas, 1990b, p. 28), it does not mean that the researcher is still not allowing the "inner workings of her tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness" (p. 29). "Incubation is not a period of putting something aside, or putting action on hold to do something else. Incubation is [merely] the period when additional input is stopped" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 67), so that the researcher can just live with the question to reorganize and re-form the information already revealed to create new meanings and feelings. The researcher's goal in this phase is to cease the intense focus on the phenomenon to reveal a deeper awareness and consciousness of the phenomenon to self. This deeper awareness cannot be reached while the researcher is engrossed in the phenomenon because she or he is unable to 'see the forest for the trees.'

This occurred during the time between my oral examination and ethics review and when I finally began to talk to the families. I chose to interview my own family first, but

not until I had at least one other family who was prepared to participate in the research. In the end, this took approximately six months.

Illumination. Like immersion, illumination is a phase that should occur naturally when the researcher is "open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition" (Moustakas, 1990b, p. 29). It is during this phase that the qualities and themes inherent to the question break into the researcher's consciousness. Phase 4 begins the moment the inner work of phase 3 spontaneously breaks into conscious awareness (Sela-Smith, 2002). This phase is often seen as a new awakening to the question, which allows the researcher to see what she or he was not able to see before or to see an image that had previously been distorted. As in the previous phase, the researcher continues to be receptive to a deepening self-awareness of the phenomenon without conscious striving or concentration. Often it is during this phase that the researcher's fragmented knowledge in relation to the question comes together. It is truly an *Aha!* phase.

This phase began for me when I finally found the first family who agreed to participate. All of a sudden it was real, and I needed to be completely aware of my internal thoughts and external verbal and nonverbal behaviours when I began to ask my family the questions. One of the most profound *Aha!* moments occurred during the interview with my family when I realized just how many family stories we had that demonstrated what a strong and resilient family we had become over the years.

Explication. Explication takes the *Ahas!* of the illumination phase and deeply examines what has been "awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (Moustakas, 1990b, p. 31). During this phase the researcher continues to utilize "focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognizes that

meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend on the internal frame of reference" (p. 31). Researchers must also continue to "attend to their own awarenesses, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and judgments as a prelude to the understanding that can happen in conversations and dialogues with others" (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 68). This is the phase in which I as a feminist human ecologist fully acknowledged these frames as they connected with the question. By the end of this phase the researcher is able to explicate "the major components of the phenomenon, in detail, and is now ready to put them together into a whole experience" (Moustakas, 1990b, p. 31).

For me, this phase was best illustrated when I began to try to find themes within over 100 pages of transcripts from the interview of my own family. I was living my family stories over and over again. For example, many of our stories centered on turning points in our life as a family, such as the death of parents and grandparents, beginning kindergarten, and other firsts in our family. I found this to be a very emotional time because I had not really realized just how strong our family bonds were.

Creative synthesis. Generally, these first five phases are repeated after each interview and again after the interviews are completed. The sixth, creative synthesis, is generally experienced only after all of the interviews have been collected. The first five phases were truly repeated each time I interviewed a family. For this reason, I came to see the process of conducting a research study using heuristic inquiry as a spiralling process. I came back upon each of the first five stages of the research a total of five times. Although I circled back to the beginning stages of heuristic inquiry with each family, I was never again at the same point on the circle. Instead, I had not really circled around in the process, but spiralled up around to the same point of reference, but further along on

the spiral. I had a strong need to be very clear in my mind about what the guiding question was and to be able to engage with the family to hear their family stories. In listening to the stories I had many *Aha!* moments as I heard portions of my family story told by other families whom before this research I did not even know existed. After each interview I immersed myself back in the family to hear their stories. I listened to each tape and carefully checked each transcription to ensure that I had correctly written what they described. I then wrote their stories both through the eyes of their family and through my own eyes looking into their family.

Creative synthesis is the last phase that a heuristic researcher enters in researching a question. By this time she is fully familiar with all of the data, their qualities, and their themes. She is able to explicate or clarify the meanings and details of the whole experience. This phase can be achieved only through a tacit awareness of the phenomenon and the intuitive powers of the researcher. If the researcher has not carefully gone through all of the other phases of the process, creative synthesis is not possible. This final synthesis is often presented as a narrative of the process that the researcher has undergone to answer the question. It often includes co-researchers' poems, stories, pictures, and other creative achievements, as well as the verbatim accounts of those involved in the research. It is important to remember that explication and creative synthesis are not meant as a form of analysis of the data collected. True heuristic inquiry involves only the depiction of the phenomenon and the meanings of those studied. Not only does analysis not add to the heuristic inquiry, but it is also actually seen as detracting from it and removing the aliveness of the findings. For this reason, analysis of the data collected in this study was kept to a minimum.

Creative synthesis was difficult because of the sheer volume of the data, which was over 600 pages of transcripts from a total of 18 individuals in 6 families, and the strong passion that I felt for my research question. I took a number of months before I was fully able to write this dissertation, but in the end, this too became an *Aha!* moment for me.

Although heuristic inquiry and the relativistic nature of meaning and experience are important to ground this research, feminism and its attention to gender also influenced the research because family is a gendered construct. Gender is one of the lenses through which the results must be interpreted. Thus I used feminist heuristic inquiry to study planned two-mother families. The goal of heuristic inquiry is not to create the typical planned two-mother family, as it would be in other forms of phenomenology; rather, the goal is to tell the multiple stories of these families. In the end the results did not produce one composite family; instead, they illuminated all of the families.

In reading and synthesizing the information on heuristic inquiry, I came to see this process as a flame. I, the researcher, have a passion, a burning desire or flame inside, that compelled me to investigate a particular experience or phenomenon (initial engagement): In this case, what does it mean to be part of a planned two-mother family, and what are the family stories of the family and individuals in planned two-mother families? After having fleshed out the experience for myself, I looked outward for other similar flickering flames (recruitment of participants). When I found these other flames, I basked in the light of their flames with them (immersion), then withdrew and sat in the dark so that no new light from their flames was introduced (incubation). This process allowed me to reflect on the already existing light of their flame. By sitting back, away from the

flame, and reflecting on the light of the flame, I was able to see it in all of its colours—colours that I might never have seen had I continued to allow in new light (illumination). This helped me to recognize the coming together and moving apart of the light of the flame (explication), and I was able to go both to the light and away from the light to gain a better understanding of the light. I then repeated this process with others who have the flame until I felt that I had seen enough flames to understand my own. Last, because I had engaged so deeply and wholly in the full experience of the flames and their light, I was then able to go on to display the lights in their entire splendour to the world (creative synthesis).

Given my choice not to distance myself from those participating in my research, heuristic inquiry was the appropriate type of phenomenology to use in this study. I saw my family and myself as central to the study. To 'other' me or those participating in the research would have further marginalized lesbians and planned two-mother families and set them apart from society.

Research Method

As discussed in Chapter 1, the research question was, What are the lived experiences of planned two-mother families? I asked the participants to tell their memorable family stories. The purpose of this study was to explore in depth how planned two-mother families saw themselves and what had been their experiences of being a family in Edmonton, Alberta. The six families who chose to participate in this study were interviewed in their homes, at a convenient time for them. By interviewing each of the families as a group in their own home, I was able to observe their interactions and their home environment. All members of the family were present during the interview. The

only family members not involved in the research interview were those who were under the age of two and just too young to participate. The interviews were recorded to avoid missing any information that the families shared. I also took notes when there were things that happened that could not have been captured on the tapes such as nonverbal interactions between family members.

Selection Criteria for the Participants

I used a purposeful sampling approach (Bernard, 2000) to identify six planned two-mother families in Edmonton, Alberta. The research was limited to planned two-mother families in this one city as I felt that the experience of lesbians in others parts of this province or in Canada might be significantly different. I believed this because provinces and municipalities have the ability to enact laws and policies that either support or discriminate against lesbians and their ability to create and be a family. These regional differences in laws and policies could lead to differences in how planned two-mother families are perceived and treated in the community.

Special Issues in Sampling Lesbians

Most qualitative research uses some form of purposeful sampling. The sampling process is purposefully biased to reveal the best cases for the research study. In heuristic inquiry, information-rich cases are specifically chosen to yield the strongest essence of the phenomena. All of the families in this study were recruited through word of mouth in the community.

Although I placed advertisements in local lesbian publications and put up posters in a local gay and lesbian organization, none of these methods yielded participants. Given the sensitive nature of the population who were interviewed, it is not surprising that they

were unwilling to come forward without knowing me. "Studies on hidden populations raise a number of specific methodological questions usually absent from research involving known populations and less sensitive subjects" (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997, p. 791). The social invisibility of planned two-mother families, as well as the heterosexism and homophobia that they experience, made it difficult to invite them to participate in research. Researchers must also realize that homophobic and heterosexist statements made by research participants can also impact the researcher's own health and well-being (Luce, 2002). In addition, the ability to find information-rich cases can be further "hindered by practices that maintain the so-called invisibility of lesbian/bi/queer women in the name of protection" (p. 3).

An additional issue in studying lesbians, especially those who are further marginalized by issues of race, class, and disability, is that of ethically researching vulnerable populations (James & Platzer, 1999). James and Platzer identified eight issues that they felt that researchers need to take into account before beginning research on lesbians. Researchers must be careful not to further pathologize individuals or families, deepen the stigma with which they are already dealing, perpetuate their outlaw status, invite voyeurism, expose their protective mechanisms (in the case of lesbian-led families, this is often their invisibility), identify them by using their real names or details of their life that would identify them, misrepresent them, or ignore the bigger-picture issues with which lesbian-led families are dealing in their lives. Even if researchers are aware of the sensitive nature of the population, it is difficult to think of ways to increase anonymity.

To research this vulnerable population ethically, I put into place a number of checks and balances. I asked the families to review the information that I collected for

accuracy and bias so that I did not misrepresent them, I maintained an audit trail, and I asked members of my supervisory committee to review my writing and flag anything that they believed could increase stigma or the outlaw status, invite voyeurism, or potentially expose the families' identities.

Sample Description

In total I interviewed six intact planned two-mother families between October 2004 and January 2005. I gave the families the opportunity to meet with me a second time to discuss more family stories, or clarify or expand on the stories from the first interview, but all declined because they believed that they had told all of their memorable stories in the first interview.

The families were recruited through advertisements in local lesbian publications, through a community newsletter, and through word of mouth. In all cases one of the mothers contacted me to become involved in the study, either through email or on the phone. Although I had probably been at events where these women had been or possibly we had mutual friends, the first contact with the families was always initiated by the family and not by me the researcher. When one woman contacted me I realized I knew her from my work in the non-profit sector, but we had always just been colleagues. None of the participants had ever been a client of mine or to the best of my knowledge, ever sought services from any agency with which I had been employed.

All of the couples had given birth to children while living in Edmonton, Alberta, between 1989 and 2004. Although they had all given birth in this city, they had all become pregnant in their own unique way. Three couples had used known donors. One of these couples had conceived through insemination, whereas another had intercourse with

the sperm donor, and the third did not disclose how she became pregnant with the known donor. One couple used sperm brought in by a local doctor to be inseminated in his office. Two couples underwent insemination in a fertility clinic, one in Edmonton, and the other travelled three hours to another clinic.

At the time of the interview the biological mothers ranged in age from 27 to 47 years and gave birth between the ages of 25 and 36. Social mothers in the study ranged from 33 to 48 years of age. In all cases the social mother was older than the biological mother. In all but one of the families both mothers were in their late 30s and 40s. Two families had two children each, whereas the other four had only one child, although one planned to have another child and one spoke about possibly adopting a child. Of the two families who had two children, one was in the process of privately adopting a child whom they had had since he was an infant; and in the other family each mother had given birth to a child. In five of the families only one mother had given birth. Of these five social mothers, four were infertile, and one had never tried to get pregnant but said that she might try to do so in the future.

The children in the study ranged from 6 months to 14 years of age. In total, these six families had eight children. It is interesting that there were really two groups of children in the study. Four of the children were aged 2 or younger, whereas four of the children were between the ages of 7 and 14 years. These four older children participated in the family interview.

All of the mothers were employed outside the home, although one was on parental leave after the birth of the child, but planned to return to work once her year of leave was up. One family was Jewish, and the other five were either Protestant or Catholic, and

most were still involved with a mainstream church. All of the mothers except one was White (she was Aboriginal), and all had some postsecondary education. The length of their relationships varied from 3 to 17 years.

Although it is often difficult to research a population that is frequently invisible, I believe I was able to conduct this study because I was known and trusted in the community, as well as a part of the community. I also believe that it has become easier to do research with same-sex families as there is now far less fear of being out as a result of all the recent changes in laws and policies in Canada that have offered enhanced protection and recognition to same-sex families. In addition, there has been a decrease in the marginalization and stigmatization that lesbians and their families have suffered because society has now become more accepting of a variety of family forms.

Table 1 outlines the full demographics of the six families.

Ethical Considerations

The issue of maintaining confidentiality is especially important when the population is small and vulnerable. To protect anonymity, I changed all of the identifying information that could be changed without compromising the data. I gave the families the opportunity to withdraw from the study up to two months after having completed and reviewed their last interview and to read their transcripts, view their drawings, and read what I had written about them before it was made public. I respected the families' choice to remove any information that they found particularly sensitive or that could identify them. It is interesting to note that no families withdrew from the study; nor did they choose to exclude any information they gave during the interview. Before I began talking publicly about the findings of this research, I again went back to the families and asked

them if they were comfortable with my talking to the media. All of them confirmed that disclosing any of the information that they had shared with me was acceptable.

Table 1

Demographics of the Six Participating Families

Family tree number	Biological mother and age	Social mother and age	Length of relationship	Method of pregnancy	Children and sex of children
1	Donna (43)	Lorna (48)	13 years	Unknown sperm donor in doctor's office	Sky 10½ years (male)
2	Mona (36)	Theresa (early 40's)	6 years	Unknown donor at sperm bank in this city	Tiffany 14 months (female)
3	Jill (27)	Joan (33)	3 years	Intercourse with male friend	Meagan 16 months (female)
4	Brenda (36)	Cathy (45)	4 years	Unknown donor at sperm bank in another city	Dylan 6½ months (male)
5	Karen (45+)	Barb (48)	17 years	1. Home insemination of sperm from male friend 2. Private adoption	1. Kory 14 years (male) 2. Chris 2 years (male)
6*	1. Brittney (40+) 2. Monica* (40+)	2. Brittney	10 years	1. Home insemination of sperm from male friend 2. Unknown donor at sperm bank in another city	1. Louis 14 years (male) 2. Liam 7 years (male)

*Monica is Louis's stepmother.

Data Collection

The questions that researchers ask are guided by their ontology, epistemology, method, and theoretical orientations. Typically,

> in-depth interviews are much more like conversations. . . . The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant's views [on the phenomenon or construct under study,] but otherwise respects how the participant

> frames and structures the responses. . . . The participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108)

Interviewing is not a neutral or objective tool; rather, it is influenced by characteristics such as gender, race, and sexual orientation, as well as by the researcher herself because her behaviour and interactions in the conversations influence the process. Given that interviewing and the interviewer can bias the interview conversation, I attempted to allow the families to tell their stories without interjecting my feedback, and I avoided the use of follow-up or secondary questions unless they were necessary. I recognized that my gender and sexual orientation might have an impact on the findings, but I believe that being a lesbian and a parent enhanced my ability to collect the data because I am known and trusted in the community

Once I decided to include myself and my family in the research, I began keeping a reflective journal. I used this journal before I began the interviews as well as to record my thoughts and feelings while I was conducting the interviews. During the writing of this dissertation I was able to go back and read the reflective entries in my journal. This process facilitated my writing and reflecting on both the process and the content of the interviews.

Each interview started with the family members each drawing a picture of their family. This process was tape recorded to capture any conversation relevant to this study. After this task was completed, I asked them to describe their picture and then asked the following guiding questions: "Tell me about your family" and "Can you tell me memorable stories about your family?" (Appendix D). I asked these two questions until each family member could think of no more information to share. To conclude the

interview I asked the family members to draw a picture of their family as a group. I left the tape recorder on to capture any conversation that was occurring while they drew.

The purpose of the drawing exercise and the pictures was to observe the family members interacting with one another in an exercise in which they were focusing on what family meant to them, first individually, then as a family grouping. I believe that this collection of the data through a kinetic activity (drawing) rather than a conversation helped to elicit information that might not have been forthcoming if the families had been limited to only one mode of providing information. By asking the family to draw their family, then talk about their family, and then to also show me any memorabilia that signified their family, I believe that I successfully crystallized (Richardson, 2003) the data and thus increased its authenticity and credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The purpose of asking each family member to draw a picture of her or his family first, and then at the end of the interview to collectively draw a picture of the family, was to help them to focus on describing their family and to come together in the end to work collectively as a family on a task. The stories that are told in this document are based on the entire interview data that I collected in this study, but a detailed analysis of the drawings has not been included here because I used the technique as a means to an end, not as an end in itself.

In accordance with heuristic inquiry, I conducted unstructured family conversations that were transcribed immediately. Additionally, I took time between the interviews to engage in immersion, incubation, illumination, and explication before starting the next interview. I then gave the transcripts to the family to review to increase the credibility, authenticity, and dependability of the data. While the transcript was being

reviewed and before beginning my next interview, I again spent time in incubation and illumination, while also beginning the process of explication in relation to all of the interviews thus far conducted.

In heuristic inquiry the researcher includes her experiences without influencing or directing others in the study to either confirm or deny those experiences. Rather, the circular guiding question and follow-up questions are meant to lead the conversation only at points where the conversation is mired and to help unfold the family's and individual's meaning of the phenomenon. In addition, the circular model of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) human ecological perspective also acted as an overlay to unpack the stories at the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem levels.

Interpreting the Data

In heuristic inquiry analytic techniques are used minimally during the illumination and explication phases (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). Instead, the lived experiences of each individual and family are described in detail. Throughout the whole process I followed the tenets of heuristic inquiry.

I conducted the interpretation of the data in five steps: transcribing the interviews, member checking, writing the family's stories, member checking the stories, and isolating the themes via line-by-line coding of the family's stories. I was immersed in the data during the transcription, reflection, and writing and revising (after member checking) of the family stories. It was during the time between the interviews that I was able to truly sit with and apart from the transcript, thereby undergoing the process of incubation and illumination with each family before collecting further data. Transcribing and coding themselves served as the initial interpretation of the data. The data were

coded by first assigning a number and a descriptive label to each story (e.g. 1. first trip to the grandparents, 2. giving birth in the hospital). Further stories were numbered and labelled. If they linked to a previous story or were a continuation of a previous story, a comment was put in the margin identifying that numbered story. Once all the stories in an interview were numbered and labelled, commonalities and themes among stories were identified. This process was done for each of the six interviews. In the end all the stories from all the interviews were analyzed for commonalities and themes. In total, five overarching themes were generated from the stories. Within these five themes individual stories at each of the four levels of the human ecological framework were identified and reported in the results section.

The transcripts and resulting family stories represent a comprehensive explication of each family's experiences. In the end, I listened to each interview a minimum of two times and read the transcript in its entirety at least four times.

My supervisor aided me in interpreting the pictures and transcripts, and I examined the commonalities and differences between the individual's and the family's pictures, and the conversations that I had with them during the meeting. The data reported in chapters 5 and 6 of this document represent the stories of the participants told both through their voices and through mine. Some attention is given to the drawings of the families, although the drawings themselves were not analyzed in depth for their content.

The goal of analysis in heuristic inquiry is not to create a composite, unified summary of all of the participants' or families' experiences of the phenomenon, but rather to record each family's experiences with the phenomenon and to continue to portray them in the report as whole persons and whole families. I kept interpretation of

the data as a whole to a minimum in accordance with the principles of heuristic inquiry. The resulting descriptions include the stories of each family as well as a portrayal of any relationships, themes, or patterns that were revealed through the processes of illumination and explication.

In summary, the process of data collection followed a stringent progression through the stages of heuristic inquiry as carried out through the lens of a lesbian feminist human ecologist. To stay consistent with the tenets of heuristic inquiry, I present the stories in this document as family depictions, composite depiction, family portraits, and themes.

Reporting the Data

Heuristic inquiry dictates that the results of a study are reported in a particular fashion. I was not able to locate any studies that used heuristic inquiry when a whole family was interviewed together, thus this presentation of the data is unique from previous studies using this method. For this reason I have slightly modified how some of the data are presented, but I have remained true to the method. Once the interviews were completed, I again immersed myself in the data and wrote a depiction of each family through the eyes of a family member who I, the researcher, felt could best tell the family's stories. Following the writing of the six depictions, as is required in heuristic inquiry, I wrote a composite depiction, using the essence of all of the interviews to create it. After this stage was completed, it was then my task as a researcher to write a family portrait for each family. This portrait told their stories from the point of view of an outsider. This heuristic process parallels the etic and emic perspectives that are often found in human ecological research. The final stage of reporting the data in heuristic

inquiry is the presentation of the themes that have revealed themselves from the raw data and through the process of writing the depictions and portraits. Given that I used human ecological theory as a lens to frame the research within, I further separated the themes into the ecosystem categories. This method of presenting the data can appear to be somewhat repetitive, but given that it involves revealing the essence of a phenomenon about which the researcher is passionate, it is necessary to view the phenomenon in its fullest by presenting the same data in different ways.

Transparency, Credibility, Transferability, and Crystallization

The four issues of transparency, credibility, transferability, and crystallization need to be discussed regarding their place in this study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Richardson, 2003). Heuristic inquiry requires full transparency of the researcher in undertaking a study using this method. To this end I have remained visible throughout the dissertation: through the writing of my internal conversations and reflections on the data as well as through the telling of my story in this dissertation.

Credibility speaks to whether the research is conducted in a way that ensures that the results accurately reflect the co-researchers' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I dealt with this construct by allowing the families to verify the transcripts for accuracy through member checks. Families made only minor changes to the transcripts, mostly just corrections of names and places.

Transferability or applicability is important in qualitative research even though the results are not to be generalized to the whole population to whom the phenomenon under study is applicable. Transferability can be described as the usefulness of the results

to others who are looking at similar populations and similar research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Part of ensuring that the results are transferable is utilizing a process known as *triangulation* or, more appropriately, *crystallization* (Richardson, 2003). Crystallization is an extension of triangulation (the use of multi methods to validate the qualitative research). The problem with triangulation is that, like the triangle, it requires a fixed point of reference. Given the choice of method and my relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology, this study does not have a fixed point of reference from which it started. For these reasons it is crystallization, not triangulation, which I used in this study. A crystal reflects and refracts what is out there; thus, when the process of validating the research is seen as the crystallization of the construct, such aspects as the ever-changing metaphors, descriptions, and realities can be examined without the necessity of starting from a fixed reference point (Richardson, 2003). What is seen depends on from where you view the phenomenon. I addressed crystallization by asking the family members to speak about themselves, reminisce about their memorable family stories, and draw pictures of their families. All of this was then described through the lesbian feminist lens that I, the researcher, possess.

In addition to the above four constructs, I ensured that I kept a thorough audit trail through the study to strengthen the research.

Limitations and Delimitations

Just as the research discussed in the literature review had limitations and delimitations, so does this study. The following is a description of some of these

limitations and delimitations. The first paragraph discusses the limitations, and the following paragraph examines the delimitations that I imposed as the researcher.

In doing research on a marginalized group that often chooses to remain invisible given society's attitudes and behaviours toward lesbians, finding a sample is often difficult. Planned two-mother families might choose not to participate because they do not want to be 'outed'. Anonymity in this study is difficult to assure because of the small population of planned two-mother families who have conceived a child together in this city. Largely, Canadian society is still not welcoming of lesbian-led families, which could be the result of a lack of accurate knowledge about these families. Some people may act on inaccurate knowledge about the families and behave in a discriminatory way. This lack of information influences the macro-level society, which is by and large heteronormative, the macrosystem through its lack of lesbian friendly policies and laws, and the mesosystem level when mainstream families ostracize lesbian-led families. More specifically, many people do not understand planned two-mother families and may make assumptions and act on them in a homophobic way. The limited access to the fertility clinic in this city until the late 1990s and the cost of assisted conception kept the number of potential families for this study very small.

Some of the delimitations that I have imposed on this study include my definition of planned two-mother families as families who include two mothers who have conceived a child in their current relationship. Although I do not believe that families must include two parents or children, I have placed these delimitations on this study. I also required that the families currently reside in the city where I live and that they resided here when they got pregnant; although they might have gone elsewhere to become pregnant, because

I believe that the context in which a family lives has an impact on how they see themselves. Therefore, including families who reside in other areas of the province or country could have affected the results of my study, in which I have examined the families using the contextual theoretical frameworks of human/family ecological theory and lesbian feminist standpoint theory. Last, I chose to limit my sample size to six families to allow me to collect rich data on the meaning of family. A small sample size is in accordance with heuristic inquiry, which some believe requires only a sample of one (the researcher) (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Summary

In summary, heuristic inquiry is particularly useful when researchers want to investigate the meanings, qualities, themes, and essences of the question in which they are passionately immersed or when they want to deeply explore a question involving a lived experience of a phenomenon that has great meaning to them personally. It is "concerned with meanings, not measurements; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behaviour" (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42).

I designed and conducted this study within the parameters of both human ecological and lesbian feminist standpoint theory and heuristic inquiry, as I have outlined in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation. Families were included if they self-defined as a planned two-mother family and were passionate enough about the research question to tell their family stories. The families drew their family pictures individually and then as a family group to help them to focus their thoughts on their family and the stories they had to share. In addition, they participated in a family interview on what family meant to

them and related their salient family stories. I made every effort to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all of the participating families. Using the six-step process involved in conducting heuristic inquiry, I conducted the research and then interpreted the data.

The theories chosen fit well with heuristic inquiry. Specifically, in synthesizing and reporting on the personal and family narratives that I collected during the study, it was important that I perform this process through lenses such as the environment, the family, and the culture in which we live. Context and standpoint are important to the meanings that we attribute to our lived experiences, and the stories tell.

INTERTEXT 5: COMMONALITIES BETWEEN TREES AND HUMANS

There are many commonalities between trees and humans. Trees grow all around the world, just as people live all around the world. We are linked through our breathing. To survive, people breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. For a tree to survive, its leaves 'breathe in' carbon dioxide and 'breathe out' (release) oxygen. Humans and trees depend on one another to survive. Whatever their shape and wherever they grow, trees have common parts—roots, trunk, and branches (with leaves)—and people have commonalities with trees.

We all have roots—our family of origin. Like a tree's roots, most of the time ours are not visible. We all grow up from our roots. Some of us grow strong, and it is clear that we have been raised in good home and community climates. Others of us lack the necessary nutrients or live in a less than favourable climate to become strong. Like trees, we grow in both favourable and harsh climates.

You can tell how good the climate and the environment in which the tree has grown are by looking at its rings after it is chopped down. Humans need not wait until after death to examine the climate in which they have lived; they can tell the stories about how they have grown through the good times and the bad. Sometimes if the environment is very poor, the tree cannot even survive. It might be knocked down in a storm, the soil that holds its roots firm could be washed away, or the sap that runs through its veins might lack the nutrients necessary for good growth of new branches, buds, fruit, or leaves; it may not be able to reproduce. The same is true for humans. Without the right blend of nurturance, nutrients, friends, and family, it is difficult for us to continue to grow and prosper. I believe that it is only those of us with strong roots, solid growth, and good

networks who have been able to form planned two-mother families because the current climate in which we live is still less than favourable to create same-sex relationships and families.

As trees grow, they develop a strong outer layer called *bark* that protects them from the harsh climate. The planned two-mother families who live in Alberta must also develop a thick skin to stay strong and withstand some of the homophobia and heteronormativity that surrounds them.

Trees produce seeds, some of which, if they land in a good environment, go on to grow into trees themselves. As women, we too can produce offspring; the difference is that we continue to nurture our younglings as they grow, and trees do not. But, like trees, lesbian couples can have children only if the environment is right. In Alberta that environment is only beginning to improve and allow for children to grow. Thus, the families in this research, like the trees that began to grow in prehistoric times, represent a new growth, a new kind of forest.

CHAPTER 5: THE BRANCHES: THE PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Stand Tall and Proud
Sink your roots deeply into the Earth
Reflect the light of a greater source
Think long term
Go out on a limb
Remember your place among all living beings
Embrace with joy the changing seasons
For each yields its own abundance
The Energy and Birth of Spring
The Growth and Contentment of Summer
The Wisdom to let go of leaves in the Fall
The Rest and Quiet Renewal of Winter.
(LLan Shamir; as cited in Garofalo, 2003, ¶ 19)

This chapter is a presentation of the data on what family means to planned two-mother families. When heuristic inquiry is used to conduct a research study, the results are presented in a unique manner. The researcher writes depictions and portraits for each group interviewed, as well as a composite description that includes the essence of the phenomenon that has appeared in all the interviews. In this study this method is combined with the human ecological framework that also guided the collection of information, which was then presented within the concentric circle model. This research method and the subsequent presentation of the results can lead to some repetition of the findings. This chapter includes the two exemplary individual family depictions, followed by a composite family depiction and the portraits of four of the families. The term *exemplary depiction* is used in heuristic inquiry to describe an account of a phenomenon that exhibits an extremely rich, full, and descriptive explanation of the essence of the experience.

I have chosen to give voice to all of the families in this dissertation by writing about each in this chapter. I believe that because these families had the courage to talk about themselves even though they have often experienced discrimination in society at large and in the lesbian community, they deserve to have their stories told. Where possible, all of the depictions and portraits are presented in first person through quotations and thus retain the emotion and language of the families. I have changed only the names and identifying information to protect the anonymity of the families. I have chosen to tell the story of my family here, using pseudonyms as well, and to reflect on our story as I have all of the others and thus allow our voices to intermingle with those of the other families in the study.

In heuristic inquiry the themes are identified before writing the family portraits and depictions, but to improve the flow of this document and keep this chapter length manageable, the themes and the creative synthesis are included in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively. As mentioned above, the depictions and family portraits follow below.

Meet the Families

Although all of the families involved in this study have conceived a child together, there are many differences regarding their other characteristics. Each of the six families interviewed is described in this chapter. Some provided more rich, descriptive details about their family in the interview, and they are portrayed here in more detail.

Each family began and ended its interview by drawing. In the beginning each member drew a picture of the family, and at the end of the interview they drew a picture of their family as a family. As mentioned in the methods section, the purpose of these drawings was to observe the family's process in drawing themselves, both individually

and as a group. The initial drawing also served the purpose of encouraging the family members to think about their family. I have not analyzed the drawings for content in this dissertation because this was not the purpose of the drawings or of the research. I have chosen to include only the drawings of the two families who are portrayed in the family depictions below.

All of the families live in the same large city, and all have lived in that city since before the conception of their child(ren), although some had traveled to conceive the pregnancy.

Family Depictions

A family depiction is a comprehensive explication of the core themes of a family's experience. Before beginning to write, I reviewed the verbatim transcript of the family's interview as well as the individual and family pictures. During this period of immersion, I attempted to identify qualities and themes presented in the data. Once I completed this, I wrote an individual depiction and family portrait of each family and then went back to the original transcript to make sure that I had accurately reflected the stories. I have changed only the names and identifying information to protect the anonymity of the family. This section begins with the two exemplary family depictions, which are followed by the composite family depiction. Although all the families were exemplary and told exemplary stories, these two families were chosen for the depictions as they told more detailed stories about what family meant to them.

Family 2 Depiction

> A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in. (Greek proverb; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 99)

This depiction is written in the voice of Theresa, who is the social mother in this couple.

We are definitely a family. Ever since we had Tiffany, 14 months ago, it has really cemented us into a family unit. I think if you had asked me before we had her I might had described my family as my family of origin but now this is the family I think of when you ask me to "tell me about your family." Tiffany has been our glue. She has brought us closer together with one another and with our families and friends. When you want something for such a long time and you wait and wait for it and then you have it, it is so exciting.

We lived in [___] for a number of years before coming back to Canada. It was in [___] that I tried to get pregnant. We even tried IVF [in vitro fertilization] but it didn't work. Do you know all the infertility treatments are paid for there; they really want people to have children. I wasn't sure how I would react when Mona got pregnant here in Canada after I tried for so long, but actually I am glad I had tried because I think I could be there more for her through the process at the fertility clinic, because I knew what she was going through, I don't think that would happen in a heterosexual relationship. She even looks like me; sometimes I have to remind myself that she is not biologically mine. But who the biological mother is has never been an issue, no one has ever said anything like "she's mine and she's not yours."

I like the fact that as a family we can define our roles, we are not stuck in doing it the way it has always been done. Mona and I both are very active in parenting our daughter. She is an absolute joy and has brought so many wonderful things into our lives. We had no expectations about what all this would be like so whatever happens, happens.

We had her because we wanted to have a child but she has affected so many other people. Her godmother is an older lesbian woman who did not have the opportunity to have children when she was younger and her family of origin has alienated her so her relationship with Tiffany is so important to her. She has even done a little documentary on her and she regularly visits her in the daycare as it is in the same building as where she works. I am also lucky being a freelance worker because I could come home over the course of the day during her first year of life and spend time with Tiffany and Mona while Mona was on maternity leave. At times it was a bit difficult to work out whose role was whose because when I came into the house during the day I wanted to change her diaper and do other things with her, I had to remind myself that Mona was doing that right now. It is great though, we really trade off, I will say "now I'm in charge," or "can you feed her, I have to go run and do something" and Mona just takes over. The roles we have with her and in the house are so egalitarian.

I have been concerned about how society will view her, having two moms and all but I feel we can protect her of that. We really don't make an effort to be special or unique; we are a family, a family of choice. When it comes right down to it you're going to love the kid, you're going to try and give them good values, and you're going to be happy. Mona says she sees our family through big pink frames, I think she means she seems us through rose coloured glasses, like everything is rosy, you know. I am not sure if we are naïve, but so far all our experiences in society and with our extended families have been positive. No one has ever not seen us as family and all our experiences during the pregnancy, at the time of delivery, and since then have all been very positive. At first when Mona went in the hospital to deliver Tiffany they were not really sure who I was,

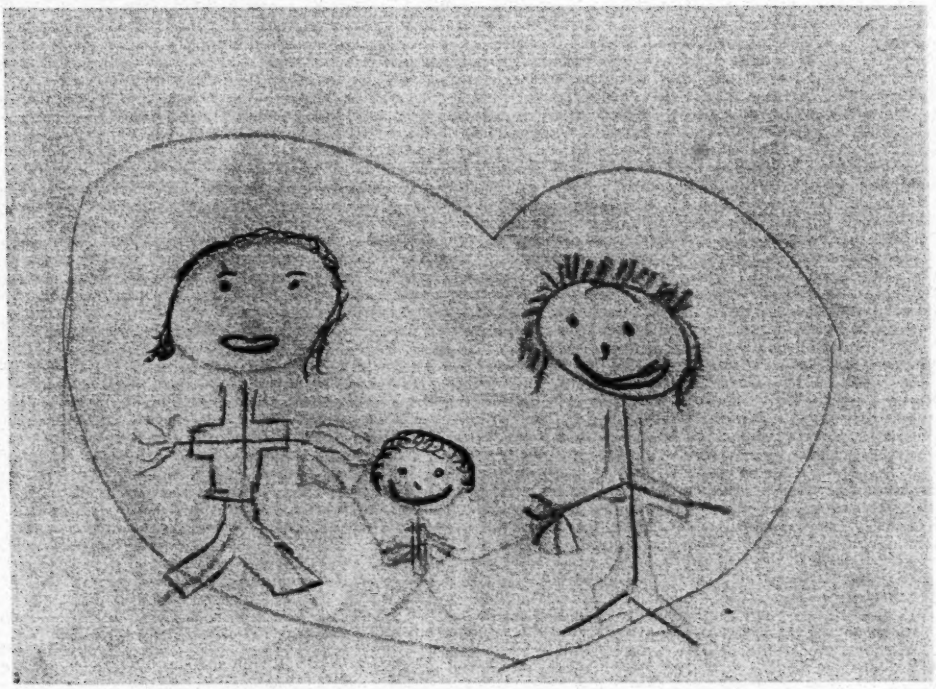
but we just brushed that off and said I was the other mother and things went great. It is important to us that we get that outside validation that we are a family. Hopefully in ten or fifteen years we won't even have to have this conversation about what makes us a family, society won't question that we are a family.

Can I show you our family pictures? At the beginning of the interview we each drew a picture of what we saw our family as. This first picture is Mona's; she's definitely the artist in the house. I just draw stick figures.

Tiffany is in the middle of us holding her bottle. She unites us and is the center of our lives while her bottle is really the center of her life. Mona is taller than me, but she drew us both the same size, so she put a box under my feet. I guess the fact that we are both the same height shows how equal we really are in the relationship. Mona said that

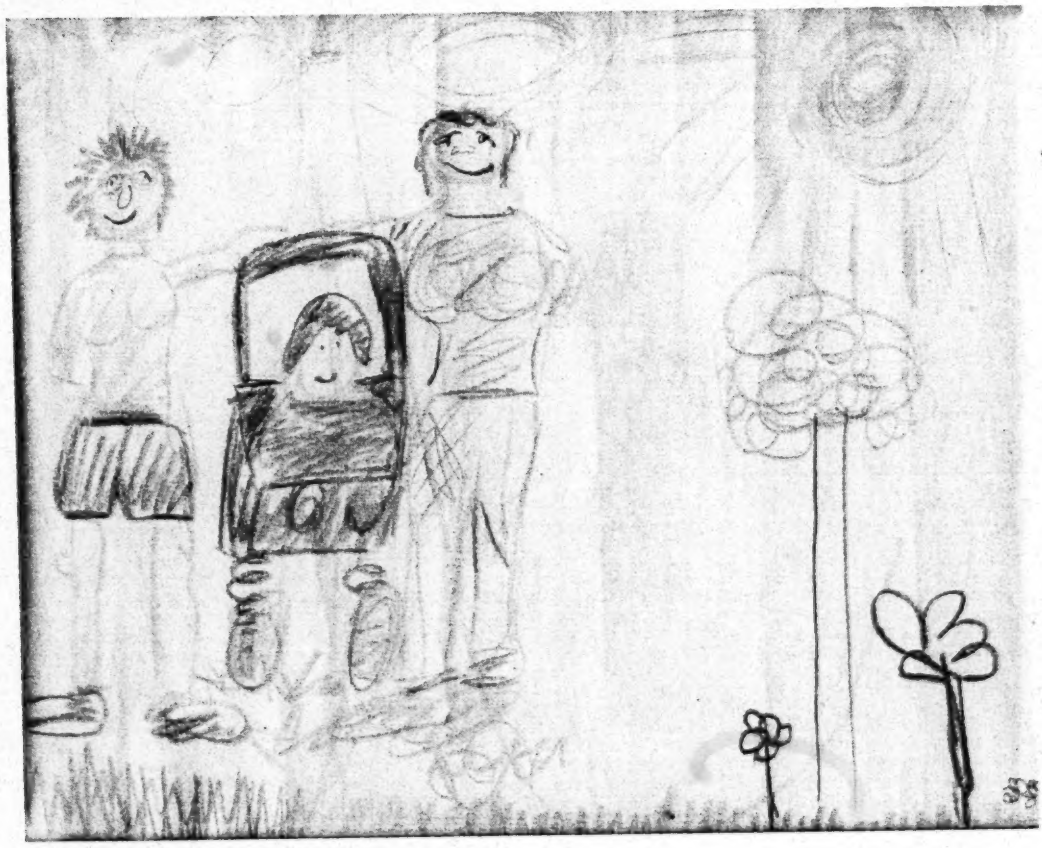
Tiffany is sitting on a pedestal. This really is her position in life, up on a pedestal with all of us worshipping her. Mona said she drew us all in a circle. If you drew a line that took in all our heads it would kind of make a circle, see?

This second picture is mine. It is a lot like Mona's. You can see that we all have a smile, just like in Mona's picture. Tiffany is in the middle of us, and we really are all one big, happy family. I symbolized that by drawing a heart around us all. It is really amazing how similar our pictures are, and we drew them without even looking at each other's paper or talking about what we were drawing.



This is the picture we drew together. You can see that Mona did the people. I stuck to the grass, sun, flowers, and the trees, the easy stuff. Remember how I told you that Mona said she saw the world through pink glasses, she actually drew them around us

in the picture. I'm not sure if you can see this, the pink was rather light. Tiffany is between us still and is ½ way in each lens of the glasses Mona drew. We really are sharing her, eh. I think this picture really signifies lightness. There is sunshine and we are out in the park. We are all happy and enjoying a nice sunny day at the park; we are even holding hands behind Tiffany's stroller.



I adopted Tiffany right after she was born and now both of our names are on her birth certificate. It says parent and parent, not mother and father. Both of our names are on her passport also. It's so cool that we are both recognized as her moms!

You know it is expensive to be lesbian moms, what with the costs of getting pregnant, the adoption, and the name changes, it really adds up. We even bought a web cam for our computer so that Mona's family could watch Tiffany and not feel left out of her growing process. Once we travelled back there so she could meet her other relatives and some of Mona's family has been here to visit as well. We have not decided if Tiffany will have dual citizenship yet as [____] requires military service when they reach 18 and we don't know if we want that for her.

I guess in conclusion I just want to say that parenting has been wonderful for us and we would never trade it in for anything. We know it will never get boring. We keep saying to one another "you know *we* have a little girl"!

Family 5 Depiction

> I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do. (Willa Cather; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 9)

This depiction is written in the voice of Kory, the 14 year-old-son of Barb and Karen.

My parents have worked hard to give me a great life. The four of us, my mom, Barb, my two year old brother Chris and me, all live in this small apartment. My parents made a choice to put the time and money that they used to have in a big house and fancy cars into us kids and travelling. We just came back from a year in the U.S. Barb home schooled me during that time while my mom worked in hospitals doing short contracts. It was great; we got to travel all over the place. About eight years ago we went to Africa with some friends of ours and we stayed with their family there for a while. At first they didn't understand my parents' relationship but when they did, they were still great to us. I

like travelling and I also like all the outings that we go on as a family. We have lots of time and money to do this because they don't always have to do house stuff. Since we came back from the States my mom has been staying home taking care of Chris, although she does work some causal time in the hospital when Barb isn't working, but Barb's job really keeps her busy. We are in the process of adopting Chris. His birth mother knew us even before he was born. Barb even drove her to the hospital when she went into labour with him. After he was born he seemed to spend a lot of time hanging out on our couch. His birth mom lived in our building and she had a little girl as well. One day when I came home from school mom asked me what I thought about keeping him. They really did give me a choice, they said to think about it for a day and then let them know. I said yes but I really didn't know what I was getting into. Babies are a lot of work, but my mom is such a baby magnet. All the babies in our building seem to end up here. Now I am more cautious to not let them stay too long [laughing]. In some ways it is good you know, 'cause this way my grandparents have something to fixate on that isn't me, now that I am 14 I really don't want to just go 'hang out' with them anymore as they walk around the mall.

I guess you are wondering why I call Karen mom and Barb by her first name. You know I am not really sure, it's just happened that way. Chris seems to be doing the same thing too and both mom and Barb are cool about it. Usually we call her Barbie, but not like the doll though.

I have a relationship with my dad too, we see each other a few times a year and talk through email regularly. His name is Richard. He is a famous artist (or at least famous in my eyes). He's gay too and lives in another province with his partner. They

have been together for a long time too, just like Barb and my mom. Barb and my mom have been together for 17 years now I think. They planned me you know. My mom and Richard even when they were in high school talked about having me, and when Barb and my mom got together they talked about having kids together. I don't know the whole details about how Richard got mom pregnant, but you could ask them that if you want. They have always been really honest and upfront with me about that stuff, I just really don't want to know the 'gross' details. I think Barb was going to have a baby also but things didn't work out. What is important to me is that they all love me and care about me. I'll let you talk to my mom now.

Hi, I'm Karen, Kory's mom; Kory said you wanted to find out some of the 'gross stuff.' I think he means how I got pregnant 15 years ago. Well, being in the medical field I knew the doctors involved in the fertility clinic and asked them if we could bank Richard's sperm. That way he wouldn't have to keep flying in at 'my time of the month.' Well the doctor in charge had a fit; she said that they were not there for 'my weird little experiment!' The nerve of her. I pay taxes. But I guess there are two systems, one for the heterosexuals and one for us lesbians. Barb could have sure used their services when she was trying to get pregnant. She and Richard tried for over a year but nothing happened. This was not the only negative reaction we had though to our trying to get pregnant. You have to remember, things have changed a lot in the last 15 years here. When we went for the ultrasound the technician wouldn't let Barb in. She said 'husbands and boyfriends only.' Well, there was no way I was going to take that. I made her go get her supervisor or someone who would allow Barb in. She was really resistant, but in the end Barb got in. I think she realized that we were not going to leave and that we were going to cause a big

scene, so she let her in. I told her I don't get to choose who comes to visit in the hospital, and that she couldn't either! We also thought that there might be a problem if we needed the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) after the baby was born. I asked my doctor if he could make sure that Barb would be allowed in if the baby had to go there. The doctor didn't have a problem with that, but then I pointed out to him that the policy on the unit was only the father was allowed in. He couldn't believe it. I'm just glad we didn't need their services when Kory was born. It took a while but finally over the years the policy has changed.

Telling our parents about the pregnancy was fun. I went for dim sum with my mom to tell her I was pregnant. Well, the waiters kept bringing around these chicken feet and I thought I was going to hurl all over the table. My mom noticed I was not looking so good and that I kept staring at this baby at the next table. Finally I told her. Tears welled up in her eyes and the first words out of her mouth were "well, I lived with your father for 35 years and I have no idea what he is going to say about his, I thought I knew the man, really well, but I have no idea how he is going to react to this." Later that night my dad called me and said, "Well the only thing I know is if this kid is a boy he really is going to need a grandpa."

Richard's and Barb's parents were another story. Barb had told one of her co-workers about my pregnancy, and her mom happened to call for her at work, but Barb was out of town until the next day. Her co-worker told her mom that Barb had some great news to tell her. Well, her mom called me and tried to get it out of me but I wouldn't tell her. By the time that Barb got home the next day her mom was fit to be tied. When Barb told her all she had to say was "that's bizarre! I'll never understand you two!" She

phoned back later that night trying to figure it all out. She said she thought Barb and I were a couple, but how could we be pregnant? Barb assured her that everything was fine between us, but she still thought it was bizarre. They have always been there for Kory, he is just glad that he doesn't have that insanity streak that runs in Barb's family!

Richard's parents didn't handle it nearly so well. When Richard told them they were quite upset. Richard said that it was the first time he realized that his parents really hadn't dealt with his homosexuality. Unlike mine and Barb's parents, who saw us quite regularly, Richard's parents really were not in regular contact with him since he moved across the country. I think they were really worried about him and that somehow we were going to take advantage of him. They were also really worried about what would happen when their conservative little town found out, because they had not even told most of their friends that their son Richard was gay. The funny thing about Richard having a kid was that this was their first (and only) grandchild. One of his older brothers couldn't have kids and the other one decided not to. Can you believe that, the gay kid gives them a grandchild! She called me and said "you probably heard how *I* feel about this *whole* situation." Later she wrote me a letter telling me again how she felt about this but she did say that this would be their grandchild and that they would be there for him. It took them a while to come around, but we took Kory out to visit them when he was about a year old and they just fell in love with him. Kory still goes and spends time with those grandparents too.

Just before I hand you back to Kory, I thought I would tell you a few more stories that Kory might not think of telling you. You know when it was time for Kory to start school we of course enrolled him in a French Catholic school. We wanted him to learn

French and, well, we are both Catholic. It seemed like the most obvious choice. Well, people, including his dad flipped. They thought we were crazy. Richard said 'what, are you guys crazy, don't you know how the Catholic Church feels about gay people!' Well thank goodness we never had any problems in that school. Some of the moms on the school's bakery sale committee did a little double take, but other than that, things were always great. We listed Barb's cell phone as an emergency contact and we both were involved in the school and went to all the parent teacher meetings. On his school registration we just scratched out father and wrote parent and parent. Now that he is in junior high I don't think anyone even knows he has two moms. You know, teenagers like to pretend we parents don't exist. It isn't that he is keeping it secret, he is just growing up. He says he tells people if he wants to. Of course the kids that moved up with him from elementary school know he has two moms. It has never been an issue for any of them. I'll hand you back to Kory to finish telling you about our family. Oh just one more thing. I thought I would let you know that Chris's birth mom watched us carefully before she gave us Chris. She wanted Chris to have all the things she saw Kory having in his life. She said that our relationship was never an issue. But she did really freak out when she realized we were both about fifty. Funny that, our age was an issue with her, not the fact we are gay. Just call me if you want to know anything else.

[Kory] Well, like I was saying, we are a really solid family. I don't really know many families like mine. I am not sure if there are a lot or not. I think there were one or two other ones in my elementary school. Mom says that when I was about 3½ years old I came home and asked her if everyone had a mom, a dad, and a Barb? She told me that everyone did have a mom and a dad, but most people didn't have a Barb. So I told her

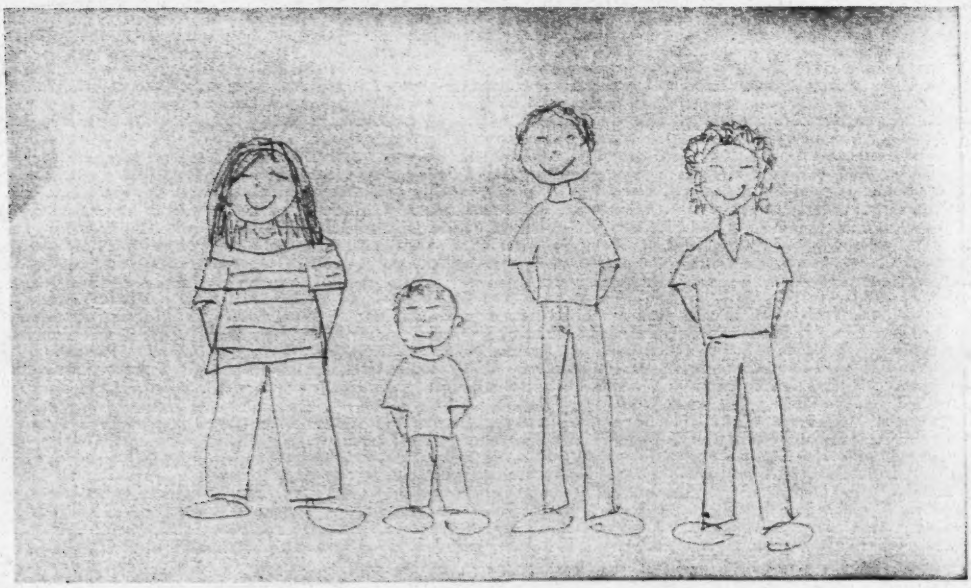
that most people didn't even know what a Barb was and she agreed with me. She said that at the end of the conversation I looked really relieved that I wasn't crazy, even though people were thinking I was crazy because I was going around talking about my mom and my Barb. I have never really had an issue with my family make up; I like it, even though I have never known many families like mine.

We sure have had to deal with issues at the border going to the U.S. though. My parents talked to me for hours about what to say when we got to the border. Barb had called ahead and the border guard in [___] said that if we showed up there he would not let Barb in because she had no reason to be going to the U.S. for a year. So we went through somewhere else but they were only willing to give her a few months before she had to come back. When she came back us kids drove back with her. We then had to get back into the U.S. somehow to meet up with mom. So there we were in the [___] airport. Barb had guardianship papers for both of us and she told them she was on parental leave because she was adopting Chris and that we were meeting up with my mom in the U.S. She had to try to convince the customs officials that she wasn't kidnapping us or something. Barb says thank goodness the official 'looked gay' because she let us in for the whole nine months left on my mom's contract. I really don't understand what the big deal is anyway. I guess those advertisements asking medical personnel to come to the U.S. are only for married heterosexual couples and families, eh. Canada sure is not nearly as backwards as the U.S. when it comes to gay rights. I think that's all I have to say right now.

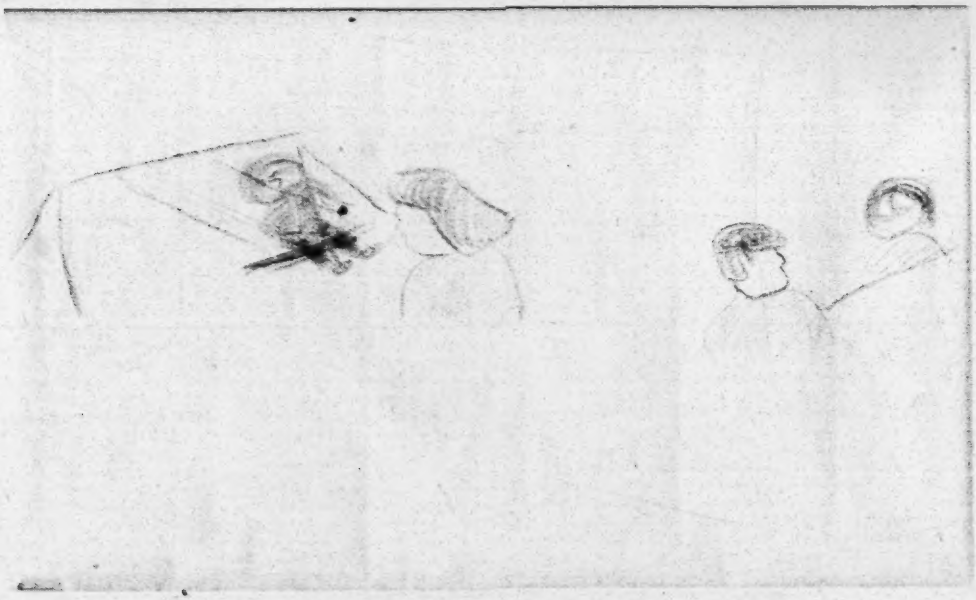
Oh I wanted to show you our pictures. Each of us drew one of our family at the beginning, and then we drew one together at the end. Chris didn't draw 'cause all he does is scribble. I'm showing you my mom's and Barbie's first.

Barb's is kind of hard to see, she drew with a red pencil on pink paper. She drew the four of us, but she also drew in my dad and his partner as well as her parents and mom's parents. Us kids are standing there in between mom and Barb. While the others are off to the side and up above us. I'm the one with the Bright eyes t-shirt on. I'm only 14 and I am already taller than both of them.

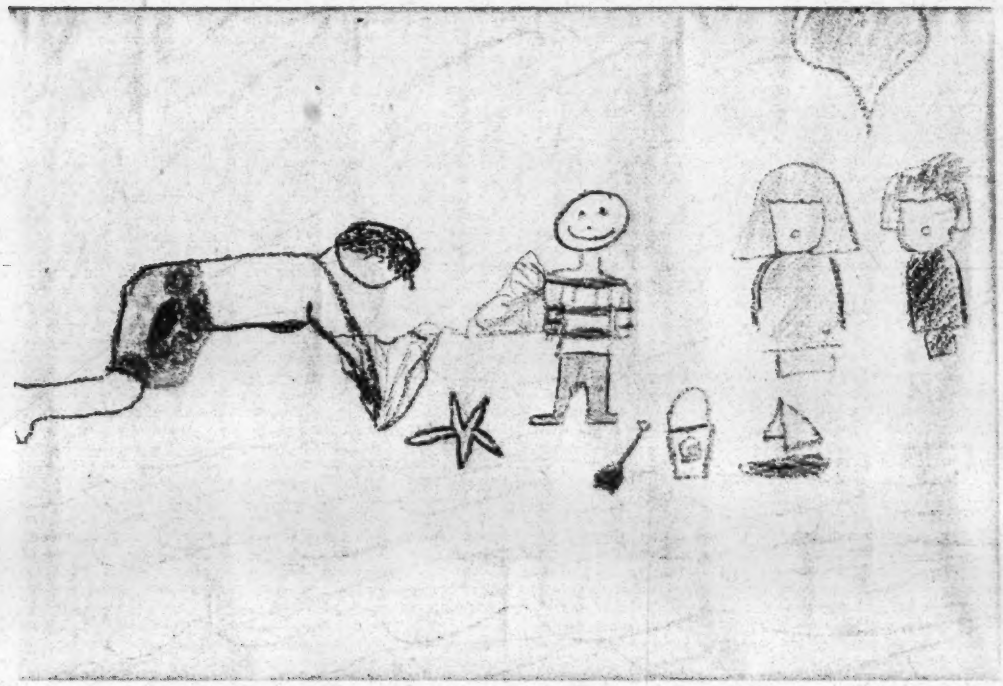
This is mom's picture. She just drew the four of us. It's funny, each of them drew Chris next to them and not me; I wonder if that means something? Mom said the picture is of us on vacation somewhere but I don't see anything in the background so I don't know where we are.



Now this is my picture. Mom is pushing Chris on a swing in Hawrelak Park. We go to that park lots to hang out and have picnics. That's me off to the side with Barbie. I'm the one with the Donald Trump hair.



This is our family picture. Lots more detail in this one, eh? We took a long time to draw this picture and we talked and laughed a lot while we did it. It was kind of like doing Pictionary, except worse, because it was supposed to look like us.



We planned it all out. Barb drew Chris, Mom drew me, and I drew my parents. We are at the beach in this picture although Barb drew a fire pit. The beach is one of our favourite places to go as a family, some of our best memories center around camping and the beach. I'm the one with the fancy rainbow shorts digging a hole. Mom said I have muscular arms but I think she also drew me with boobs, although she claims it's hair. The way I look I'm not going to have any action with the girls on the beach! It's ok though since I am left watching Chris while the two of them are off on their own. See they are very much in love. I even drew a heart over them to show that. I guess I kind of drew

them like little Fisher Price people. They have no arms, legs, or eyes. All they have are mouths. I wonder if that means something? Oh well, we are at the beach, so we must be having fun. We're definitely a family that likes to get away and hang out together.

That's all I have to say about our family. I think we are a pretty cool family, and that's what counts.

Composite Depiction

Once I completed the individual depictions, I gathered them all together and again began an immersion process to outline the common themes and qualities of all the families' experiences of the phenomenon. When I finished this undertaking, I wrote a composite depiction of the planned two-mother families with the common qualities and themes that the individual depictions included. The following is the composite depiction.

The experiences of the planned two-mother families were a bit different. Some of it depends when you got pregnant. The fertility clinic here opened up for lesbians about five years ago. Before that it was really hard to get pregnant as a lesbian, usually you had to find a male friend to donate sperm to you. Now things are much easier; you can walk into the clinic as a couple and get service. At least you can walk in if you are a white, well-educated, middle-class couple; I'm not sure about the others. Even some of us white middle-class educated lesbians still are not using the clinic to get pregnant. We all seem to have our own way to make this happen. Even with the access here some couples choose to travel to get pregnant because they are not comfortable being seen in the clinic here or they feel the wait list is too long. Every couple also has their own story about their experiences during the pregnancy and at the time of delivery. Most things have definitely gotten better but not ultrasound. Lesbians still seem to be having a problem

getting their partner in to see the ultrasound, "husbands and boyfriends only" you know. At least things like the NICU have opened up and now allow the partner of the biological mom in, regardless of their sex. Nowadays the social mom can get her name on the birth certificate and adopt the child right away. You can even have the child have both parents' names for their last name. Things like this changed about the same time the fertility clinic opened up. This was also about the time the Vriend decision and the M v. H decision were handed down by the Supreme Court in Canada. Things have opened up for us, but there is still a ways to go. We still cannot adopt through the public adoption system and we can't marry one another, but as for pregnancy and parenting together things have definitely improved. Most of us have had very few negative experiences in terms of being viewed as families. Occasionally an odd neighbour, school teacher, or one of our children's friends will have a problem with it, but rarely.

We like the fact that the roles in our families are more flexible. We really get to define who does what and how. It's funny though, in many ways our families are more traditional looking than those of our heterosexual friends. I think that the fact that we had to struggle so much to have children, it really cements our relationship and we stay together. You don't often hear about lesbian couples who have a kid together splitting up or getting their kids taken away because they are out partying or somehow not taking care of their kids. Our friends kind of envy our relationship and like the fact that we are not stuck in roles and that there is 'a wife at home' to take care of things.

Maybe it is because society as a whole doesn't see lesbians as mothers and as families but we ourselves don't really see us as a family until we have our kids. Until then we are a couple, not a family. Once we have kids we know we are families even if

others question it. Those of us with older kids struggled with our parent's acceptance of the fact we were having a child. Most extended families did come around once our child was born, but just the idea that we would 'go and do this' really freaked them out back in the 1990's. In some cases it was a hard decision to decide who would get pregnant, or who would get pregnant first, but those of us that got past this original hurdle are still together and parenting. For more than half of us one of the women actually couldn't get pregnant and carry to term, but this still did not always make it easy to deal with. In most cases though, both moms feel equally connected to the children and there isn't a "he likes you more than me" or a "he's not my child" thing going on.

We are really well connected. Whether it is with our friends or with the services in the community, we access them to their fullest, even when they look at us like we don't belong. Maybe it is because we had to work to have this child and it just didn't happen because of a contraceptive failure or something, but we all seem to be really strong advocates for our children. Those of us that have ended up with the 'square kid trying to be forced into the round whole' have really gone to bat for them. We make sure that our children get the services they need and deserve. Most of us go check activities and other things out before we put our children in them. The last thing we would want to happen is for our child to be discriminated against because she or he has two moms. Speaking of him and her, most of us have boys. I hear that is because Y sperm swim quicker than X, so they make it to the egg quicker when you inseminate around ovulation. Of the eight children in the six families, only two are girls and both of them are still infants.

The lesbian community really has a problem with the boys though, even today. Those of us with older boy children really experienced a lot of discrimination from our community when we got pregnant. As a result, those of us with older children have mostly heterosexual families as our friends and children's playmates. Now with such a 'gayby boom' going on here, the families with the little ones can all get together and there is a community forming here. But it is a bit of a misnomer to think that just because we are all planned two-mother families, that we have lots in common. We may have some similar characteristics beyond the fact that we have kids who have two moms, but in essence we are really just as different as heterosexual families.

The stories that we told about our pregnancies, the births, and our child's growing up have many similarities such as the difficulties we have had navigating the medical system; or having to tell our parents that we (or our partner) are pregnant even though we are lesbians; or having to explain to our children's friends that they have two moms, not a mom and a dad. Our children go through the same developmental milestones as those in heterosexual families do, and we have the same battles and successes that heterosexuals do. In many ways we really are not all that different, except as Stacey and Biblarz (2001) so aptly describe it, we are different but in "modest and interesting ways" (p. 176).

Family Portraits

Once the individual and composite depictions are written, heuristic inquiry requires that the researcher again go back to the raw data and the individual depictions to build a portrait. Unlike the first-person stories of the depictions of families 2 and 5, portraits are written in third person. Because the portraits are my experience of the families, at times I have included my perceptions of what was going on in the families. I

have included portraits of families 1, 3, 4, and 6. To begin their portraits, I have chosen a tree quotation that symbolizes each family and its life journey:

Family Tree 1

> Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong. (Winston Churchill; as cited in Garofalo, 2000, ¶ 39)

Lorna and Donna have been together for 14 years. Twelve years ago they decided to have a child together but faced many roadblocks. They approached male friends who in the past had expressed an interest in having children, but they all turned them down because of personal issues. They investigated the fertility clinics in their province and were not able to access them. Lorna and Donna discovered that a city in a neighbouring province had some access, but many same-sex couples had been turned away because of the rigorous psychological testing that was required of them, but not of heterosexual couples. In the end they found a doctor who would bring in sperm from a sperm bank out of province and inseminate single women in his office. Donna made an appointment to see him and was successful in becoming pregnant. However, because she felt that the doctor would not have been willing to inseminate her if he had known that she was a lesbian, Lorna could have no part in the process of insemination, although the couple picked the donor together. They now have a 10½-year-old boy named Sky. The decision of who would carry the pregnancy was a difficult one for this couple, and after Donna's pregnancy, Lorna tried a number of times to become pregnant, but in the end was unsuccessful in carrying a child to term.

This family has dealt with many issues during its time together. Lorna was raised in a large very Catholic Aboriginal family, whereas Donna was from a small Protestant

family. The couple has always lived close to Lorna's family but has paid visits to eastern Canada to visit Donna's family. Both Donna and Lorna described this blending of two very different families as challenging. Lorna said, "Well, I have to say that it's been difficult at times getting to know each other's families, but I have felt really welcomed by your [Donna's] family over time. They have been very good with me" (2167). These very different upbringings as well as their son's learning disability and food allergies have at times consumed them, but as he has aged, they have begun to find time for themselves as a couple again. Even though the stress of Sky's problems has been difficult at times, Lorna said, "I'd never give it up, because I really believe you need to advocate for your children to get what they need" (918). At times there were tears during the interview as they described some of the painful occasions, such as the death of Lorna's mother and Donna's grandparents. Lorna summed it up well:

> All in all, I am so happy that we are 'out' with them [our families and friends], that we are honest with them about who we are, because we can meet them up front about some of the things, and we don't have to hide who we are. We can actually talk about the things that are bugging us. (2175).

When their son Sky was asked whether he felt that they were a family, he said, "Yes, we're a family who loves each other, takes care of each other" (421). Lorna added, "[We are a family who] plays with each other and cares about each other" (428). She went on to say:

> I think I can't really divide it all up, 'cause I think family is everything about who we are, and about who we choose to be with, and love and care about. I am here with you [Donna] and Sky, and that's the beginning of my own internal family. But as I move outward, I share you with the rest of my external family, which is my mom, who past away two years ago, my dad who passed away many, many years ago; you know I share you with him too. (452)

> Sky and you are what I call my internal family and my base, and then, what I was given, all my teaching and stuff come from my external family now, which before I got involved with you was very much my internal family, but they have become my external family, but they are very important, and my, biological family. (505)

> So want to just say that they're important in my life, but they're where I stay grounded, they're where I have been taught my family values, that I am sharing with you guys, they've always been— . . . Most of what I have learnt has been really valuable. For the most part there have been a lot of very strong family values that was given by my family, which were to give, to share, to support one another when there are really hard times, together, and to be in community, yeah. But then that's the large family I have, you know. (520)

Lorna's strong sense of spirituality came out in her stories, and when she was asked about her relationship with Sky, she held him and said, "This is what makes it special. He may not be my biological son, but he is; he feels my pain. We are enmeshed in our family. And we support each other" (955).

> Lorna: We follow spirits, we follow animal spirits, we watch them, we watch how they behave in life, and we pray to them. Like the wolf spirit, and the bear spirit, which is the one I am following now and Sky's following the horse spirit and the dog spirit for our family and you [Donna] the wolf spirit. And then there is spider woman, that's a spirit I brought to the family, because that is the one I have had for years to help me with my grandmothers, its helped me out for years and years, a long time ago. And then there is the ladybug spirit and the rainbow spirit. They're all here in my life. (1416)

> Lorna: Also the rainbow, which of course, helps me remember that life is about balance and colours and brightness and peace and the rainbow reminds me about all that kind of stuff. And then there is the tree. The tree for me is a very important symbol of my life, it is about life and the tree of life and it dances in the wind and it lets me listen to what is going on and changes through the season and it shows me how things in life change. I just watch the tree and listen to the tree. So that's it, it kind of grounds me. (2126)

This family has not pursued Lorna's adoption of Sky. When asked, they explained that no one questions Lorna as Sky's mother, and Lorna said that she has adopted Sky in the 'Indian way,' and nothing else is necessary. The family has tried to adopt a child though Children's Services, but they have found that although they were initially

welcomed, they have met with a great deal of opposition and have yet to have a child placed with them.

The family told many stories about their experiences over the past 14 years. Many of the stories were about things they did with Sky or things that Sky did, such as the first time he made coffee for them at age four, or at age three when he decided to let the dogs out to play in the neighbourhood, and he drilled a hole in the fence. As with the other families, the story about the birth was one of the most vivid. Lorna began to describe Sky's birth as follows:

> I guess a really important one [story] was the day that I caught you; that was very memorable. I won't forget that one. It was very special to have my mom there, praying over you, and just as you were ready to give birth to Sky, . . . we were having a home birth and she was doing her kind of . . . moving the energy . . . from the top of your head, just standing in the background with two hands open over with your energy, moving, like the healing energy down. Moving it down through your body it was kind of laying hands, top of your head, and she just kept doing that, and you were having the baby and you were holding onto my hands, soooooo tightly that you almost broooooooke my knuckles. And then the midwife said that if you want to come, come now. So we changed places, and I went to help catch Sky, and you came out so quick after your head finally came out. And then when you were born I said, "Oh, look, look what you have! You have your baby boy, Prince!"
> Sky: Harold!
> Lorna: [laughing] Yes, that's what I told her, I said Prince Harold is here. Because a week before you were born . . . we always thought you were going to be a girl, . . . so we were going to call you Teoni, and a week before you were born I had a dream—
> Sky: That I was going to be a boy.
> Lorna: —that you were going to be a boy, and that we were going to call you Prince Harold. No, we were going to call you Harold, but since I really didn't like the name Harold, I decided to call you Prince Harold, . . . so that's how you got Prince Harold.
> Sky: No I didn't get that name.
> Lorna: It's kind of a nickname; it's one of my pet names.
> Sky: Who else was there?
> Lorna: Auntie Dee, your auntie Leah.
> Donna: Auntie Barb.
> Lorna: Auntie Barb and grandma came at the very end.
> Sky: Grandma came at the end?

> Donna: Just 'cause she thought you were already born.
> Lorna: In the kitchen was your big sand tub, right? your trough, and it was full of water and your Auntie Leah and me and Auntie Dee, we'd empty, we'd empty some water out that was cold, and we'd put buckets of warm water in; we'd kept it warm, and your mom stayed in that trough, that pool for, oh, gosh, how many hours? Then at the very end she decided that she just felt too weak to stay in there!
> Sky: Then I fell out?
> Donna: [laugh] No, it wasn't that easy.
> Lorna: No, it wasn't that easy. It was another two more hours after that, it must have been [before you were born]. (1098)

This family did not know any other planned two-mother families who had conceived children together. When they decided to have a child together, there was no support in the community for this, and many of their lesbian friends stopped seeing them once they had a child. Although they now live in a neighbourhood where other lesbian-led families live, they still feel somewhat isolated from the community because most of the other families with two moms who are around their ages had children in previous heterosexual relationships. Many of the biological fathers are involved, and the couples have time away from parenting while the child is visiting her or his father.

This family has clearly dealt with many issues, but they are strong and work hard to be the kind of family in which they think children should be raised.

Family Tree 3

> Though a tree grows so high, the falling leaves return to the root. (Malay proverb; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 7)

Joan and Jill have a 16-month-old daughter named Meagan. Joan and Jill, aged 33 and 27, respectively, had been together for only three years when they were interviewed and were at least a decade or two younger than the other women in the study, although their daughter was the oldest female child and oldest infant in the study. This family in

many ways illustrates the new generation of lesbian-led families. Both had been fully out for some time, and Jill made the decision at a young age to have children. They have been able to choose to become pregnant young because there is now access to fertility clinics and other services that were not available to the other women when they were that age. There is also much more acceptance of pregnancy in the lesbian community, and more young women are able to share their experiences with one another and pass on necessary information about the process of pregnancy and delivery, given the fact that not all of the mainstream services are welcoming to lesbians. All of their experiences regarding becoming pregnant, the nine months of pregnancy, the delivery, and the first 16 months of Meagan's life have been positive. Jill said, "I forget that we're different. Either we haven't had any issues, or I haven't noticed them" (336). Right from birth they made sure that Joan was listed as Meagan's mother on all documents; currently, she is listed on the birth certificate as the 'father.'

At the time of the interview the couple was in the process of trying to conceive a second child. Jill is the biological mother of Meagan and was trying to conceive again, this time with a different donor. Jill's first pregnancy was through intercourse with a friend of hers with Joan present. They plan to go through the fertility clinic this time. At this point Joan has not chosen to become pregnant because she is the primary breadwinner in the home, although she may decide to do so in the future. At the time of the conception of their first child, the couple was in the process of moving in together, but made the decision together to have a child. They saw the birth of their daughter as the event that made them a family, not becoming a couple. Having a child has changed their lives. Instead of going out a great deal, they have begun to have groups of friends over

for parties. Friends have played a large part in their lives, and they know many other lesbian-led families in the city as well as in Joan's hometown. Since Meagan was born, they have traveled back to Joan's hometown once, and they did not experience any problems at the border.

This family spoke a lot about their families of origin in the interview. Although they are both emotionally close to their family of origin, they live physically close to Jill's family, whereas Joan's family lives out of the county. Their age and the newness of the relationship might account for why they were the only family interviewed to talk a great deal about their families of origin. Both Joan and Jill are Catholic, but religiosity plays a different part in each of the families, with one being French Catholic and the other English Catholic. Joan said of her family of origin:

> I think it's definitely a change for my family, something that they've had to get used to. And they have done it quite well, I think. Because they are old school, especially my father. Not necessarily very religious. That was the one nice thing that I didn't have to worry about too much, was that my parents aren't very religious at all in our family generally. They are to an extent. So I think, I think it has been a learning experience for them and they adjusted. I don't know if that is a good word. So, I mean, I guess what my point is, I think *our* [Jill, Joan, and Meagan's] family kind of speaks to other families like our own family. Because they [the families of origin] are opening their mind, they are seeing that being gay maybe isn't as terrible as they grew up thinking that it was. (319)

She went on to say about Jill's family, "We've been lucky with her family, because they've really taken to me, lesbian me. Okay, I guess with the whole lesbian thing. And of course they love Meagan, so that kind of forces them to accept, I guess" (152). She also spoke about her reception at work in a male-dominated profession:

> I think being out, like being out at work and with our families, that it opens their minds to the definition of what family is. I feel like that's my little part that I can do for gay and lesbian rights, because neither one of us are very political in that aspect, but I feel that just out, just being who we are, and being proud of our

> family shows to other people that, that we are just like anybody else and we have a lot of the same goals. We just want to be happy and raise our family and not have anybody tell us that we are going to burn in hell and all of that. (343)

Jill observed, "I find it kind of funny because we are more the typical nuclear family than a lot of heterosexual families out there. So I find it kind of ironic that they are fighting against the gay marriage thing and all of that" (169). They both commented that they are the only family at the pool in which both parents are actively involved in the lesson.

As a family they are raising their daughter to be bilingual; each mom speaks to Meagan in her mother tongue—Jill in French and Joan in English. Jill laughed and said:

> It's funny though, because we really often tell her the exact same thing, one right after the other. I'll say it and Joan has no idea what I just said, and Joan will tell her the exact same thing in English. We really think a lot a like in terms of what we are going to tell her and how we are going to tell her. I noticed that, because I know what Joan is saying. (667)

When asked what Meagan calls both of them, Joan said:

> We're trying to have her call me Mom and her *Maman*, but we've figured out that she calls us both momma, the best we can tell. Every once in a while I'll get the Mom, but we are pretty sure right now she calls us both the same. (719)

Like the other families interviewed, Joan and Jill spent a significant amount of time talking about the pregnancy and birth. When Meagan was born she needed to be rushed to neonatal intensive care to be placed under heat lamps. Joan was able to join Meagan in intensive care immediately, and Jill came as soon as the medical staff had finished with her in the delivery room. The reception that they received during the pregnancy, at the time of delivery, and while Meagan was in intensive care was very positive. The only negative experience that they described occurred before Jill was able to arrive in intensive care to be with Joan and Meagan. In the neonatal intensive care unit

one of Jill's family members who did not agree at all with their relationship and the pregnancy was allowed into intensive care and was actually allowed to hold the baby even before either mom did. Although they found this incident troubling, the fact that this family member held Meagan before either of the mothers did really had nothing to do with their being lesbians.

In summary, this family's experiences have been very positive, and they are looking forward to the birth of a second child soon.

Family Tree 4

> Do not be afraid to go out on a limb. . . . That's where the fruit is. (Anonymous; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 10)

Brenda and Cathy have a 6½-month-old son, Dylan, whom they conceived after being together for about three years. The couple decided to use an out-of-town clinic to become pregnant because they had heard that it was not possible for lesbians to conceive in the city in which they lived. They later found out that they could have conceived here. "We just didn't want a battle because we knew that . . . later we'd have other pressures and things to worry about. . . . [We] didn't want getting through the door to a service to be a big battle" (114). In the end they were very happy with their decision to travel for the insemination:

> Cathy: It gave us that time to kind of unwind and getting out of your normal work environment and your everyday life. . . . Everybody there was great, supportive. We would go for lunch afterwards and just kind of talk about our experience and stuff like that and drive back. It was just; it made us feel closer in that too, of experiencing all that. (125)

They described their friends and family as "very, very supportive" (168) and were pleased that it "all worked out so incredibly well; . . . it's like *too* well" (178).

The couple both knew they wanted to have children, even before they got together. When asked how they decided who would become pregnant, Cathy quickly said, "She was the womb that worked! I knew that I wasn't going to have any kids—until her, until she came along. She was interviewing people for, you know, a partner to have kids with [laughs]" (747). Brenda "was wooing me because I wanted kids" (870). Cathy admitted:

> I really didn't think that I'd be sitting here where I am today, you know. It's a total dream come true. It's just very overwhelming and I'm still saying, "Wow, I'm a mom!" It's something that I would never trade, not at all, never. You [Brenda] are stuck with me for life now. [laughs] (757)

Since having their son, Brenda and Cathy have thought a lot about family and what makes them a good family to raise a child:

> Cathy: As parents . . . we have to elevate our behaviour, in my opinion, to reflect that. There are enough really bad examples around of how people are letting their kids down by divorce, or . . . they've got a revolving door . . . of everyone else they're dating, and their kids are experiencing all this stuff, and they've got no stability. . . . [We are] just trying to really raise him with a good sense of stability. Yes, that he feels safe and communication [is] maintain[ed] with him, teaching him what we hope will help him grow and to be a decent human being, a gentle person, respectful of all the things that we instil with us and the people that we surround ourselves with. (238)

Brenda and Cathy defined family as "a supportive group" (224).

They were very passionate in their description of their family and how they conceived Dylan. Laughter filled the home throughout the interview, especially as they described the process of becoming pregnant. The phone call of acceptance from the fertility clinic came right after they moved into their new 'family' home:

> Cathy: I was kind of running around upstairs, doing stuff, and the phone rings and, it's the clinic making our appointment. And, of course [laughs], I'm running around, trying to find a pen, and I was just like, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

> [laughs] And then, of course, I phoned you [Cathy] at work. "We've got an appointment!" I was babbling away, and she's going—
> Brenda: No, she phones me and she goes [laughter], "Hello, the phone rang." [laughter], so answer it!
> Cathy: I was just like, "Oh, my God, we got our phone call! We got our phone call!"
> Brenda: Yes. But it was a message; you can replay. [laughter]
> Cathy: I know. Well, that's right, because I missed it; then it kicked into the answering machine. So when I was trying to find a pen to write all the information down [laughs], I'm running from room to room. I couldn't find a pen because everything's still in boxes, and—oh, it was funny. (827)

The fun did not end with the phone call of acceptance. This was the story they told of discovering that they were pregnant:

> Cathy: She came home and tested, and I think as far as my putting it down, it instantly kind of lit up that it was positive, and [laughs] I just kind of stared at it, and she kind of came back to the bathroom entrance, and I looked at her, she looked at me, we both looked at it. We're not even saying anything; we're just kind of like—
> Brenda: "Do you have another one?" [laughs]
> Cathy: Yes, "Oh, maybe we should do another one just to make sure." Finally we ended up doing it three times before we kind of like, "Oh! Okay." And it was like [laughs] we were in shock, and then we phoned the doctor right away and said, "We need to come in for a blood test to make it official." And, of course, we walked into the doctor's office, and there was big hugs and squeals for both of us. [laughs] (259)

When asked how they chose their donor, Brenda replied:

> Every time we went to phone [the fertility clinic about our choice], they were all gone! So we had the top three that we had chosen ourselves, and one was in—I phoned back to you [Cathy] because I was doing this from work and faxing back and forth between the fertility clinic and work, and I phoned you and said, "How about this one?" You said, "I don't know. It sounds—" "Well, you know what? You've got three seconds to decide because this is it. (507)

They talked about their experiences with the sperm bank:

> Brenda: the atmosphere was really weird. It was almost hostile times. There were some couples that came in, and they went to opposite ends of the sitting room. They didn't even talk to each other, and you didn't know they were together until the doctor called the name and then people from both ends go in together.

> Cathy: Yes. That was something that we kind of were really observing and kind of realized that, Gee, there's other couples that come here that are *having* problems conceiving and all this stuff, and we're not. (528)

Even during the pregnancy and after the birth, the couple continued to enjoy humorous incidents such as the following:

> Brenda: [We were renovating during my last trimester.] So she was downstairs, and I didn't realize I was standing right under the fire alarm, and it was wired into the light with the breaker. She flips it back on, and it goes off, and it was the first time he actually jumped, because both of us were startled. Because we both jumped. I could just feel his whole little body go, Whoooooa! [laughter] Actually, it was funny. Couldn't wait for her to get back upstairs [so I could tell her]!

> Cathy: [We] went to a PRIDE parade.
> Brenda: And we got approached by two gay men who wanted to know
> Cathy: if she would be—
> Brenda: —a surrogate mother.
> Cathy: He goes, "You have such a beautiful son!" And he looks at Brenda and goes, "Would you be willing—?" [laughs] She's like, "No." [laughter] (444)

After the birth of their son they quickly moved to give Cathy parental rights to Dylan. They even went as far as to have a party, where they "had cupcakes with little *Mine*s on them" (217).

Although Brenda is the birth mother, they share parenting equally. Currently, Cathy is on parental leave, and Brenda went back to work after receiving a promotion while on maternity leave. They expressed gratitude that the laws have "quietly changed" to allow them to share the parental leave, have both names on the birth certificate, and adopt. These opportunities for shared parental leave, second-parent adoption, and both names on the birth certificate were not even possible until the last few years in Alberta.

Cathy and Brenda live in a mixed-class neighbourhood where in the past some planned two-mother families have experienced a number of incidents of discrimination.

They hope that by the time their son reaches school age, having two moms will not be the issue that it has been for those with older children:

> Cathy: It's different. I mean, every family has a unique situation. I mean, nowadays it's the norm to have in your kids' classrooms, single parents and grandparents or grandmas raising [children]. I think by the time Dylan goes to school there *will* be more, you know, gay parents and stuff like that. (1361)

Cathy and Brenda described two incidents in which they experienced a negative reaction to their forming a family: The first one occurred during the ultrasound. They were both in the room and excited about looking at Dylan on the screen, and the technician realized that they were a lesbian couple, abruptly ended the ultrasound, and refused to continue.

In the second incident they had taken Dylan for his second immunization. Cathy took him in and Brenda stayed in the waiting room because she said that she could not watch him cry through the needle again. The immunization went well, and he hardly cried, but when they were leaving the nurse's office, she asked to speak to Brenda. Cathy assumed that it was about the fact that nurses are now tracking incidents of postpartum depression and that she needed to do a follow-up with Brenda. Brenda realized that that was not it at all when the nurse began quizzing her on Cathy's guardianship and told her that she needed to see the papers. She insisted that even if Cathy did have parental rights, it really did not matter because there was no way to enter into the computer that the family consisted of two moms, and she intended to list Brenda as a single mother and the father as unknown. The nurse was very critical and unpleasant to Brenda, who became too angry to deal with the issue at that point. Two days later she spoke with the nurse's supervisor and the supervisor's supervisor and received an apology from everyone. When they saw the name of the nurse, they merely said, "Oh, well," which indicated that they

were not surprised about her negative reaction. Brenda believed that the nurse was reprimanded over this incident.

It seems clear from this couple that they have benefited greatly from many of the changes that have occurred for lesbian couples wanting to have children. They have been able to conceive a child through a fertility clinic in this province, complete a second-parent adoption after his birth, and share the parental leave that the government provides after the birth of a child. All of these things were not possible even five years ago. Some things have not changed though, such as medical personnel's personal biases against them as a couple. So, although many of the laws and policies have changed to allow planned two-mother families to form with greater ease, societal reactions towards the family have not always kept pace.

The couple felt that they are leaders and trendsetters and had set the path for those coming after them. They said that many people have approached them about what they have experienced and asked for advice on how to proceed. They now know many others who are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

Brenda and Cathy were very happy and laughed throughout the interview. They are enjoying their new status as a family and have extremely positive attitudes; one cannot help but think that they are setting a wonderful path for Dylan to follow.

Family Tree 6

> Oak trees come out of acorns, no matter how unlikely that seems. An acorn is just a tree's way back into the ground. For another try. Another trip through. One life for another. (Shirley Ann Grau; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 21)

Brittney and Monica became a couple when Brittney's first son, Louis, was about 3½ years of age. Louis was conceived in a lesbian relationship that ended about six

months after he was born. At first Louis had great difficulty with Monica becoming part of his mother's life, and he reported regularly sabotaging the relationship. Louis, who is now 14 years of age, said:

> Monica came over to visit my mom, and I was really young, and I opened the door and saw Monica, and I'm like—and then she's like, "Hey, can I come in?" I'm like—and I slammed the door in her face because I wanted my mom to myself. (369)

A few years into the relationship the couple decided to have a child together, and Monica conceived a son named Liam, who is now 7 years of age. Both of the children were conceived through artificial insemination, Louis with a friend of Brittney's and Liam through a fertility clinic in another city. Monica explained, "We kind of looked at all different options, but it seemed that this one was the best way to go, so we started it." Brittney added, "I was more of the belief that making a family together is the same thing as any other couple that have fertility problems. They don't think any differently or think about the biological factor" (386). They described their experience at the fertility clinic as follows:

> Monica: The first nurse we had that inseminated, it was a bad vibe. You just knew. You almost felt like she was sabotaging it. Then the second time we went, the nurse was just amazing.
> Brittney: She had me involved in the process.
> Monica: Yes.
> Brittney: It was me down there with the pipette. Whereas the other one just came in and—
> Michelle: Yes. [She made you] feel you shouldn't be there. (1693)

The family has dealt with many issues, including a neighbour who harasses them because of their relationship. Because of this and the other hardships that the family has had to endure, Monica asserted that the children are "going to grow up tough and resilient" (1077). When they consulted a lawyer about the harassment, his response was,

"Move," which they found "disturbing, and *that* was the last thing we were going to do, because if we move, they win" (741). "Most of our conflict has been in our own neighbourhood" (1733) and with individuals at Louis's various schools. The family often used black humour while discussing one another and the issues with which they have dealt.

As a result of his family arrangement, Louis has faced problems with his peers and bullying at school, which have affected his self-esteem and self-confidence. Although the problems have lessened over the years, the family was still able to tell detailed stories about these occurrences. Louis said, "Lots of people ignored me and stuff at [my elementary school] because you guys were lesbians" (690). Brittney lamented, "When he was going to school, the kids' parents would say, 'You're not allowed to play with him because his mom is a lesbian'" (1527). They also described another incident:

> Brittney: [Once] you came home [from school] and asked without Monica in the room if it would be okay if you told people that Monica was your aunt or a friend that lived here. Do you remember that? And I remember both of us going, 'Yes, you have to do whatever you need to so that you don't succumb to being ostracized.' But then, on the other hand, we were both like, 'Oh, that's just so sad that you have to do that.'
> Monica: We felt badly.
> Brittney: Yes. But we also wanted him to do whatever he needed to do to feel accepted and safe, and so we said, "Absolutely!"
> Monica: And then that's when we kind of said too, in any situation, I mean, it's not because we have anything to hide, but it's because people make judgments and—
> Brittney: Ignorance.
> Monica: —and we're never hurt or offended if he feels like he has to lie. (1238)

They then talked about whether they felt that they had played a part in why Louis had struggled with self-esteem and being accepted by his peers:

> Monica: But I don't know if it might have to do with our own confidence as well, because, I mean, we were early in the relationship, do you know what I mean?

> Brittney: Yes, true enough.
> Monica: And I was not as confident as I am now to just be me. Yes. And so I think that maybe plays a role as well in that confidence, because now we'll just march in there and go, "Yes, we're his moms, and how's school going?" (1354)

Brittney added, "I think I've noticed changes in the school system even from when Louis was growing up" (682).

The family was also able to tell positive and humorous stories about school:

> Brittney: It used to be funny, because at school they'd be like, "Now, wait. Which one of you is the mom?" And you'd actually have some kids coming up, just going, "Are you Liam's mom?" And then they'd be confused because the next, "Well, are *you* Liam's mom?" [laughter]
> Liam: And then what would you tell them?
> Brittney: Yes, I'm Liam's other mom.
> Louis: At the start of the year she [one of his teacher's] is like, "So Louis, I was wondering. Does your dad want to be the coach for the basketball team?" I'm like, "Um, I don't *have* a dad." And she's like, "Ooooh. Would your *mom* want to be the coach?" [laughter] I'm like, "I'll have to ask."
> Monica: Did you say, "Which one?" [laughter]
> Louis: No. It's like, "Okay, maybe—"
> Monica: So does she know you have two moms?
> Louis: I don't know; I don't know if she's clued in when I said that or not.
> Monica: No, probably not.
> Louis: No.
> Monica: She just assumes you're from a "*broken home*" [laughter]. She'd rather assume that you're with a "*single mom!*" [laughter] (1206)

Both Monica and Brittney described their extended families as very supportive of them. Monica believed that

> we're very fortunate because both of our extended families are very accepting and open with the kids. When I hear stories of other families how, the grandparents are not accepting of the children. It's just; I can't fathom that, so we're very fortunate. (1081)

They told many happy stories about spending time with extended family on the farm skidooing. When asked whether the children call each of them Mom or use their first names, they responded:

Brittney: It varies. Louis always has called Monica Monica and me Mom, and Liam kind of did Mom and Brittney for the first little while, but it goes back and forth. Mostly Liam, it depends on his mood.
Monica: Most of the time it's probably both Mom for both of us.
Monica: It's directed at, if one of us is there, that's the Mom; and if we're both there—
Brittney: Whoever answers.
Monica: —whoever answers, yes.
Brittney: Yes. I think people stress about that; we just thought whatever happens.
Louis: It's kind of back and forth. If one person's in the room, I'll be like "Mom"; then she'll turn around and see what I want. But either way I'll say your first names too.
Brittney: But even when we're talking, I'll refer to Monica as "Check with your mom" or stuff like that too. Goes both ways. And then Liam went through a phase where he was calling both of us by our first name for the longest time. (1098)

Brittney also spoke about the issue of who is the 'real' mom:

A friend of ours was asking me if I felt different towards Liam [than] Louis because of being biological, and I have never had any different feelings as a parent that Liam's not mine or doesn't belong to me. I think the only thing that I've felt upset about was that biologically I didn't have any part of Liam, and that part I found upsetting that we're starting a family and I can't be a part of that genetic makeup. And I think that's the only thing that I've ever given any second thought to, like this isn't fair. Anybody else that has a family, they're allowed to do that, whereas we're not; we don't have that option. (1375)

Monica and Brittney talked about how the feelings of not being the biological or 'real' mom played out for them as a couple:

Monica: I know I have [gone through feelings] with Louis, and you've gone through it with Liam, where—
Brittney: Yes, "He loves you more—"
Monica: "He loves you more!"
Brittney: "—and he loves you more" and—
Monica: "He wants to be around you." But again, it's not because of that; it's because Brittney was the stay-at-home parent, and I was *never* home—
Monica: —and so when I would come home it was like, "Wow! Okay! Here is—"
Brittney: Yes. And I'm the stay-at-home one, so I'm doing all the disciplining and taking care of the day-to-day, whereas he wouldn't see Monica as much.
Brittney: And just the jealousies of him loving you more, doesn't like being around, just go through those phases because, of course, there's also that connection to you biologically, genetically.

> Monica: But, I mean, heterosexual families go through that too where the kids seem more attached to one parent. But again, it's our own issues, our own insecurities in this. It just comes from being gay; you internalize it. (1537)

Monica described a lesbian couple she knew who were trying to become pregnant. They already had a child from one woman's previous relationship with a man. The woman who had not had a child

> was trying to get pregnant. She was having a hard time having a few miscarriages and that, so I said to her, I said, "Well, why doesn't so-and-so get pregnant?" And she said to me, "Because then it wouldn't be *mine*." And I think my jaw must have dropped open and hit the floor, because I just was kind of struck with the words, because I thought that it was so strange that she would have that perspective as being with this partner, that had to bear the child or it wouldn't be hers. I just thought it was the strangest thing. (1422)

Some time ago both mothers adopted the other child.

> Brittney: That stands out in my mind because we always put down Monica on any documentation for Louis and they would 'oh, it doesn't fit, she's not the father,' it's like, don't you remember when we were filling out the birth certificates or whatever it was, the adoption certificates or something.
> Monica: oh and we were phoning them.
> Brittney: I thought it was the birth certificates, that they weren't changing it.
> Monica: but they changed it!
> Brittney: they did change it, birth certificates used to always say mother and father.
> Brittney: when I went through the adoption process I wanted to get new birth certificates
> Brittney: and my agent said no, it says mother and father on it.
> Monica: "we can't do it, we can't do it"
> Brittney: and I said, but, we have a legal adoption here and it shows that she is the other parent and we went through some hoops over it and it finally came through and it changed the documentation and has Monica listed as the other parent. (1753)

They have had to use this documentation while travelling outside Canada. Even with the adoption, travelling outside the country has been an issue for this family:

> Monica: We thought it was important [to have documentation saying we are both their mothers] because we have two kids with separate biological moms, and we

> just thought if anything ever happened to us, the last thing we would *ever* want is for them to be split apart. And you know what? You can think your families are going to do the right thing, but they're not going to necessarily do the right thing. I mean, I *know* they won't do the right thing. So yes, we were very definite with that. We found it difficult traveling with the kids, because we've done a few trips [abroad] and just found it so incredibly difficult.
> Brittney: And we were always getting, "Well, where's the father? Where's the documentation so that they can travel?" And it's like, we had the guardianship thing there, and it was like, Whoa—
> Monica: We *still* got it.
> Deborah: So with the second-parent adoption, that went away?
> Monica: No, it was still the same thing, because we still have this legal document, and *they still just don't get it!*
> Brittney: And our lawyer had said, "When you travel, get the affidavits, and you won't have a hassle going across the border." And we *had* these affidavits, and they were legal documents, and we *still* would get hassled over it.
> Brittney: And then we would get the strange kind of looks of—we were repeatedly saying, "Oh, they were both AI." Well, where's the dad?
> Monica: I mean, yes, you're supposed to be able to go through Customs as a family now, right? And we did that, and it was like, it was just, oh—
> Brittney: It's frustrating.
> Monica: Yes. You're not perceived as a family. What boggled my mind the most is that in the eyes of the federal government we're considered a unit, a family, and in the province of Alberta we're not. (1457)

"We're productive people. We pay our taxes and we're not the ones that are kind of in the system" (1508). "Is it different than other families?" (349).

Monica works in the field of health, and although she is out to the people with whom she shares her office, she is not out to her clients:

> Monica: Most people assume that I have a husband, so if they ask about my husband, I just kind of—
> Louis: Play along?
> Monica: —play along and don't really answer.
> Brittney: But you're also not closeted about it because you have pictures of your family up and stuff.
> Monica: Yes.
> Liam: Okay, so they're like, "What's your husband like?" and Mom's like, "Okay, so we need to do this . . . ?" [laughter]
> Brittney: By changing the subject; that's good, Liam.
> Monica: That's right; I change the subject, exactly. (1182)

In the end though, they and others clearly see them as a family and work hard to create new family traditions that strengthen them and build their resiliency. Brittney commented, "Even our neighbour has always gone on about how there is no difference, that we have the same day-to-day routines, the same battles, the same problems, the same childrearing as any heterosexual couple does. There's no difference" (1406).

> Monica: It's so funny that half of our friends out in the community, they joke and say, "Oh, man! You guys are so lucky." All the women go, "We need to get a wife!" [laughter] They all talk about that, because I think they see that there's much more equality in the house with every chore—cooking, cleaning, kids. Everything you do, there's just way more equality. I mean, it's still so stereotypically divided, we see that with our [heterosexual] friends' relationships. So yes, they all want to have wives just like we do. [laughter] (1678)

Although they spoke about being strong as a family, Louis seemed to be uncomfortable in the discussion at many points. It seemed that he had had a difficult time because of his family composition. It is also interesting to note that Louis was the only child in the study who had experienced a family break-up (albeit, at an age before he knew that it was a break-up), and thus was the only child not conceived within the family who was involved in the interview. He was the only child who was in a stepfamily situation.

This family, more than any of the others interviewed, had faced multiple experiences of discrimination. This may be why black humour played a large role in how the various members interacted with one another. Although they had experienced difficulties, their family was still strong and was accepted by extended family and most of the community.

Summary

These are the six families who made up this study of planned two-mother families and their perceptions and stories of their family. They are many of the family trees in the forest of planned two-mother families in this city. All of the depictions and portraits were rich in their detail of what family was for these families. The depictions were told through the voice of a member of the planned two-mother family, whereas the portraits were told through my eyes. A composite portrait that told the common story of the planned two-mother families interviewed was also included in this chapter. Each family told stories of both their successes and accomplishments and their challenges (droughts and plagues). These challenges may have prevented other lesbian couples from having children, but for these families they were able to rise above them and create family in their own way. The stories of their successes far outnumbered the few challenges that they have endured in their lives as families. Every member of every family saw themselves as part of a family that was headed by two mothers, even if they did not call them both Mom.

Although the number of young planned two-mother family trees is ever increasing, the current forest of planned two-mother families who conceived a child together who is now school aged is very small. The three family trees of school-aged children represent the majority of this new species of trees that is past its early-growth years. Although there are similarities among the trees in the forest, there are also many differences in the roots, trunks, and branches. It is these similarities and differences among the trees that formed the five themes from the interviews that are discussed in the next chapter.

INTERTEXT 6: THE FAMILY TREE

According to many of the books I reviewed on building an ancestral family tree or creating a genealogy, this hobby is becoming one of the most common leisure pursuits in the world. Visually speaking, "a family tree is a chart that shows your actual descent from your ancestors in a clear and easily understandable format" (Baxter, 1999, p. 356). Many books and websites are devoted to helping people to reconstruct their family tree. According to writers in this field, it is all about finding the births, deaths, and marriages. But what about those who do not marry or those whose 'marriages' and 'families' were invisible in the past? It is often said that upwards of 10% of the population is not heterosexual, so one would have to assume that on their family tree there are probably lesbian and gay family members who might be impossible to see given that they are in heterosexual marriages or just regarded as that old spinster aunt who lived with us as a child and then moved in with her 'best friend' as they aged.

I reviewed six recent commonly used books in circulation on building a family tree and found not one mention of how to handle same-sex relationships or gay and lesbian kin. In addition, my review of the most commonly used computer software for creating family trees showed that approximately half of the software programs did not accommodate same-sex relationships (thus same-sex-led families), and of those that did, many gave an error message that stated that both spouses were of the same sex before they would allow the names to be added to the tree. Some programs, such as Legacy©, specifically stated that same-sex relationships are not possible and that there is no plan to change the program to allow for this 'gender confusion.' Thankfully, GenoPro©, which

is currently the most popular genealogy download on the Internet, does allow for same-sex families on the tree. On this program's discussion board, there is an explanation of how to handle same-sex relationships (GenoPro, n.d.).

Clearly, much of the current literature on family trees has assumed that we are all heterosexual and that children are conceived only in heterosexual relationships. Thus if planned two-mother families are going to create a family tree, possibly they will have to create a 'new' species of tree, or at least a grafted branch on the old family tree.

CHAPTER 6: AND THE RESULTS ARE: GROWING A FAMILIES

> A tree is a tree—how many more do you need to look at? (Ronald Reagan; as cited in Garofalo, 2003, ¶ 11)

Introduction

By far the most difficult part of this research for me was to find the commonalities within over 600 pages of transcripts of interviews with six families comprised of 16 individuals old enough to participate in the interview (12 mothers and 4 school-aged children), for each family tree in itself is a forest because it is surrounded by a forest of friends and family. One of the tasks of a heuristic researcher is to fully immerse herself in the data via repeatedly listening to the interviews and reading and rereading each transcript, depiction, and portrait with the purpose of revealing the common themes. I found this challenging because 'I couldn't see the forest for the trees' and the changing seasons made the forest change as well. All of the families told so many extremely vivid and descriptive stories about themselves that spanned a lifetime and focused on so many topics. In addition, many of these topics touched me close to my heart (my own tree trunk) and intersected with my experiences and the experiences of my family (my trunk and branches). All of the families I interviewed shared my passion about planned two-mother families and the family stories that we hold close to our trunks. As a result of both the breadth and depth of each family's stories, to be able to see past each family tree and envision the forest was a challenge.

Some of the stories of their struggles were so much like mine that it was hard not to say, "Me too." Stories that two other families told—one incident occurred 15 years ago

and one just over a year ago—concerned initially being denied access to ultrasound. Both of these families also spoke about the invisibility of the social mother to health care professionals. I had hoped that these issues might have changed in 15 years, but I realized that they had not.

It was also hard to hear that it was easy for the families of the infants to become pregnant and for the social mother to gain legal recognition of motherhood. The lack of these experiences for my family made me realize again what we had missed. When our son was young, there was no legal recognition of my partner in his life. I am thankful that most people did not question her motherhood. Although even today we still must cross out the word father and write in mother on most forms we fill out for him.

I also found it hard to hear the children lament that at times they were forced to hide who their family was or to fight to make a second Mother's Day card or that people assumed that they were from a 'broken family' or 'conceived by a single mom.' I am thankful that our children have grown up strong and that few of them seem to have been hurt by society's perception of them as something other than what they are. Many of the stories that I heard were what I expected to hear. I was very encouraged though by the fact that, regardless of where we live, what we do, and the age of the children, most of our stories were positive and celebrated our lives as families.

After many periods of immersion and repeated explication of information from the depictions, I identified the themes. In view of the fact that I chose to utilize heuristic inquiry to guide this study and that I chose to include the voices of all six families in this dissertation, you the reader may find that there is some repetition in the information presented in this chapter. As mentioned in Chapter 5, this repetition is part of the unique

nature of heuristic inquiry, insomuch as both the process and the results are presented in a spiral fashion. Both the researcher and the reader come back around the same information, but look at it in a slightly different light. One can think of it as the spiralling life of the tree, which circles through the four seasons, always coming back around to revisit each season a year later, but seeing that season in the light of a new year. Thus this chapter contains the revisited information of the results, presented through the light of the five themes that emerged through the process of the first five stages of heuristic inquiry: engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, and explication.

The five themes were as follows: how we came to build our family tree, extending our branches, droughts and plagues, having the right conditions for optimal growth, and being an extraordinary family tree in a forest of trees. In addition, each theme could also be placed within the nested concentric circles of the human ecological framework.

Each of the families told many stories, and each one of their stories could be positioned under at least one of the themes and within at least one of the system (micro, meso, exo, and macro) levels that Bronfenbrenner (1979) described. In this chapter I have chosen to discuss only a few stories within each theme, although many others could have been included. In addition, I have not discussed stories under all system levels because some themes lent themselves more to one level of the framework than another.

The stories that the families told were truly family stories, to the point that often one member of the family would take over telling the story partway through a sentence. It was obvious to me, the researcher, that this was not the first time that family members had told these stories or discussed particular experiences in their life. Gabb (2004a), in her study of lesbian-led families in Britain, also found that

> the accounts of 'birth mothers' and 'other mothers' ostensibly told just one story of family life. These 'family stories' were not only constructed from shared belief systems and the subjectiveness of mothers, but were also *reflective*. Their stories had been 'worked over' and represented an agreed 'story' and thus the two are enmeshed. (p. 175)

For this reason I have not discussed the individual or ontological level in this presentation of results. The stories were truly the stories of families, not of individuals living in the same household.

Theme 1: Building Our Family Tree

> For the ancient Celtic sages, to commune with the trees was to enter a vast storehouse of knowledge and wisdom. Very little of this wisdom was written down, but only passed on orally or through direct, initiatory experience. So if we, now, want to understand the language of the trees as the ancients did, we need to learn to commune with them ourselves. (Gifford, 2000, ¶ 1)

It did not matter the age of the child; all the families in this study talked about their experiences in becoming pregnant and delivering the baby. This microsystem story was also the one that was talked about most often in the interview. Most families went back to portions of this story throughout the interview, until in the end they had all told a very passionate, deep, rich, descriptive narrative of their experiences. In all cases the children were present when the moms told this story, demonstrating that all of the children were well aware of how they had been conceived. These stories were often the most positive and affirming, but they were also the ones that often brought out the most pain. The following are some of the most memorable stories that the families told.

Microsystem Stories

As mentioned above, all of the families told stories about the formation of their family. They all discussed the struggles they had endured to form family, although most did not present these stories as almost insurmountable barriers; they merely described

them as hurdles that they needed to jump. Theresa and Mona struggled at first to achieve a pregnancy, with Theresa trying for a few years to get pregnant. She had even undergone in vitro fertilization (IVF). When it was clear that Theresa was not going to be successful, Mona attempt to get pregnant, and she was successful almost immediately. In the end they actually saw this experience of infertility and then fertility as an experience that brought them closer together and allowed Theresa to truly understand what Mona was experiencing during the process of getting pregnant. Theresa was not sure how she would react to the whole process of Mona's pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting, and she was not sure that she would feel that the child was hers, but in the end she did.

Lorna and Donna and Karen and Barb had had different experiences in trying to achieve pregnancy. Donna and Karen were able to get pregnant fairly easily, but later when Lorna and Barb tried, they were met with difficulties in sustaining a pregnancy. These pregnancy experiences also brought the couples closer together. In Lorna and Donna's case it also brought them closer to Sky, but they still find it difficult to discuss the second trimester miscarriage because it felt like the loss of a second child to the family.

Mesosystem Stories

Karen and Barb told the story of informing each of the three sets of grandparents about Karen's pregnancy 15 years ago, a time when lesbians' getting pregnant was far from the norm, especially given that they had parents who were strict Catholics. Although all the parents were aware that their children were lesbian and gay, none were prepared for the news of the pregnancy. Karen told her mother over lunch. Although her mother reacted as well as could be expected, her first statement was, "I've lived with

your father for 35 years, and I have no idea what he is going to say about his. I thought I knew the man really well, but I have no idea how he is going to react to this" (5, 1309). Later that day her father called her and said, "Well, the only thing I know is if this kid is a boy, he really is going to need a grandpa" (5, 1314).

Barb ended up telling her mother over the phone, although this was not how she had planned to do it. Her mother commented, "That's bizarre. I'll never understand you" (5, 1338). Barb said that her mother called back later that night because she was so confused by the news. She could not figure it out: If Barb was in relationship with Karen and they were lesbians, how could she get pregnant? Did something happen to Karen? Was Karen cheating on her? Barb assured her that everything was fine between them and that this was a planned pregnancy. Her mother still thought it was bizarre!

Lorna and Donna's extended family experience of Lorna's pregnancy and miscarriage six years ago was less positive. When Lorna's mother, a strict Catholic, found out that she had had a miscarriage, she commented, "God took the baby from you because you are a lesbian, and this is against God's laws!"

Jill and Joan's extended families' reactions two years ago to Jill's pregnancy were quite different. Their parents had been aware of the pregnancy and excited by the prospect of a new grandchild right from the beginning. They did not go through a stage of shock as parents did a decade earlier. Their reactions were positive, even though both sets of parents are strict Catholics. The times really are *a-changing*!

Theme 2: Extending Our Branches

> It's one thing not to see the forest for the trees, but then to go on to deny the reality of the forest is a more serious matter. (Paul Weiss; as cited in Garofalo, 2003, ¶ 12)

All of the mothers interviewed currently had a very strong and positive connection with their family of origin, even if they did not live near them. In addition, all of the families were well connected to the community at large and were often involved in a wide variety of extracurricular activities with their children. By and large, all of the families' experiences within the community had been positive. Even in the case of the few negative experiences, the families were clearly able not to personalize the issue and to recognize that the problem was with the heteronormativity of the systems with which they were interacting or with a particular homophobic person in the community.

Mesosystem Stories

The mothers in this study were all out to their parents before they had their children. They all felt that their honesty about who they were had helped them to stay connected to their extended families and to have the pregnancy and children accepted into the extended family. Monica found having that extended family support very important, especially because she knew so many children who had not been accepted into both mothers' extended families. Jill was pleased that the support that she received from her parents allowed her to continue her university studies because they were willing to care for Meagan every day while Jill was in school and Joan was at work.

A few of the families with younger children spoke about knowing some of the other families with young children and having helped other couples to navigate the system to achieve a pregnancy. One of the families expressed the desire to start a play

group for children of same-sex families where the children could meet one another and the parents could get together and chat. In April 2005, three months after I completed my interviews, this couple started the play group that now meets monthly.

Exosystem Stories

When Richard, Karen's close friend and sperm donor, told his parents 15 years ago about Karen's pregnancy, they struggled with the news. It was at this point Richard realized that his parents had not dealt with the fact that he was gay, even though he had come out to them over a decade earlier. In addition to the fact that Richard's parents had not dealt with his homosexuality, they also lived in a very conservative small town, and they did not know how they would be able to tell their friends that their first grandchild was conceived by their son who was gay (since they had not told their friends that they had a gay son) and was to be born within a lesbian relationship. Richard's mother wrote Karen a letter during her pregnancy and said, "Well, you probably heard how I feel about this *whole situation*" (5, 1376). Although the relationship between Richard's parents and Richard, Karen, and Barb was very strained in the beginning, they eventually came to terms with the situation, and Kory now visits his paternal grandparents in the small conservative town at least once a year.

Many of the couples described just going on with their daily lives and making choices for their family just as any other family would. Barb and Karen chose to enrol Kory in a French immersion Catholic school in Edmonton in 1995, much to the shock of those around them who thought that this was foolish given the Catholic Church's stance on homosexuality. They said that all of their experiences have been positive, although many parents have been confused in trying to figure out the family configuration. Karen

said that when some parents realized that Kory had two moms, they had a "look of absolute horror" on their face and really did not know what to do. Even so, this did not stop Barb and Karen from scratching out "father and mother" and writing "co-parent" on the school application. In addition, even though Karen was the biological mother, it was Barb's cell phone number that the school had listed for emergencies, and it was Barb who cooked for and staffed the bake sales at school. All of this occurred at a time and place when Barb had no legal rights as a mother to Kory. It is clear that some of the families truly put out branches to the community even though the community was often not ready to see these family trees with their unique branches *blowing in the wind.*

Theme 3: Droughts and Plagues

> A tree does not move unless there is wind. (Afghan proverb; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 47)

Most families spoke of negative experiences that they had had either while forming their family or when their family interacted with society at large. None of the families spoke about negative experiences with their current nuclear family, although some extended-family members were shocked about the pregnancy; however, they all came round with time.

It is important to stress that all families, not just planned two-mother families, experience droughts and plagues, without which families would have nothing to which to compare their optimal growth experiences so that they indisputably would know that they are optimal. Aboriginal legend says that the Creator made the leaf, like humans, with two sides—a smooth side and a rough side. A good local example of this is the two sides of the poplar leaf, with its clearly identifiable rough and smooth sides. Thus, people must

tell the rough stories, those that depict their droughts and plagues, along with the smooth stories of optimal growth to continue to grow in balance. Each type of story teaches us something. The stories of our droughts and plagues teach us coping strategies and resiliency, whereas the stories of optimal growth put into action our learning.

Another example of the importance of two sides is the quest for a tree for the Aboriginal Sundance ceremony. That tree must be forked and have two sides, which thereby represent both sides of the person, the droughts and the optimal conditions, the rough and the smooth, so that Sundancers can pray to the Creator about both sides of themselves. For this reason I do not see these stories as problematic; rather, they are merely stories of difficult growth, and they help us to grow to be strong family trees.

One of the particular subthemes that appeared under both themes 3 and 4 is that of lesbian rights. The families of the school-aged children had few rights when their children were born; for example, they had no access to second-parent adoption, no right to have both names on a birth certificate and passport, and no right to use a hyphenated last name unless both parents separately changed their names, which would necessitate changing all of their personal records, right back to their birth certificates. In addition, they had limited to no ability to access fertility clinics when they wanted to become pregnant. Even some of the families with younger children experienced homophobia in trying to access these services. These represent the droughts stories, but equally important are the stories of optimal growth, the stories of how we have gained rights and how we exercise them.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that families with school-aged children have experienced and continue to experience many more droughts and plagues in

functioning as a family than do families with infants. Given recent changes in policies such as access to artificial insemination and laws regarding adoption and birth registration, it seems that these younger families have had an easier time of identifying as families and have greater support, right from the beginning of planning the pregnancy, from their extended families and community.

Although these younger families had not experienced the difficulties in becoming pregnant or navigating the systems for 'other' mother rights, it is not known whether some of them will be subjected to droughts as their children age and have more interactions with the outside world. It is interesting to note though that none of the families told microsystem or ontological droughts and plagues stories. None of the mothers expressed inner turmoil or conflict in her relationship with regard to being a family. All of the families described themselves as happy and well functioning. They did not question their status as a family, even when those outside of the family did.

Exosystem Stories

The bulk of the stories of family difficulties and stressors were stories of how societal values, attitudes, and customs limited planned two-mother families from living out their life as a family. Karen told of the difficulty that she faced in achieving a pregnancy with Richard. As a medical professional who had worked in the field of women's health, she was familiar with the local fertility clinic and the staff who worked in it. When she approached the medical director of the clinic regarding whether Richard could bank his sperm there so that he did not have to fly into town when Karen was fertile, the medical director "flipped out." This director accused Karen of trying to use the clinic as a laboratory for her "outrageous experiment". Karen, having worked with this

woman over the years, was completely taken aback by this reaction. She felt cheated that just because she was a lesbian she was not entitled to the same privileges as a heterosexual woman whose spouse was out of town, even though there was no written policy as to who could access the services.

Many of the families also saw travelling as extremely difficult. Even with documentation stating that both mothers had parental/guardianship rights over the child and that there was not, nor had there ever been, a male parental figure with rights that needed to be taken into account, the families were constantly questioned by customs officers while travelling. Monica commented on how in the eyes of the federal government they have been a family since 2000, yet when they have tried to leave or enter Alberta, or travel in the US or Mexico, they have not been perceived as a family. This was especially problematic for Barb and the two boys, who had to cross the border into the US to join Karen, who was working in the US temporarily. When she went through airport customs with guardianship papers for both children, she believed that the only reason that she was able to pass through was because the female customs officer looked like she was a lesbian and would thereby have understood her family.

Macrosystem Stories

Some of the stories that the families told were of actual policies that discriminated against lesbian couples and families. Three of the couples spoke of difficulties in getting the expectant social mother in to see the ultrasound. Two of these incidents happened at the same ultrasound laboratory, 10 years apart. In all cases the couples were told that the policy was that only "husbands and boyfriends" were allowed in. One of the biological mothers complained that it was a ludicrous policy because she would have no problem in

asking any man off the street whom she had never met before to come in to see the ultrasound, but she could not bring in her life partner. The technician, although taken aback by the idea that someone would actually bring in a male whom she did not know, agreed: "Yes, I guess that is true."

Karen had prayed that her baby would not need to be taken to the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) in Edmonton because the hospital had an explicit policy in 1990, when she was pregnant, that allowed only the biological parents to be on the unit with the baby. Thankfully, Kory did not need to be taken to the NICU, and by the time that Meagan was taken to the NICU in 2003, the policy had changed, and Joan was allowed to be on the unit with Jill and Meagan.

Although some policies have changed, there are still others that have not. Second-parent or private adoptions are now allowed in this province, but it is still not possible for a planned two-mother family to include a child in the family through a public adoption. Donna and Lorna have been trying to adopt through the public system for over five years and are still being overlooked for a placement for a child. Sadly, both Donna and Lorna are trained to work with special-needs children, and they know that often the children whom they have tried to adopt have been placed in homes where the parents do not have adequate training to effectively care for these children.

Theme 4: Conditions for Optimal Growth

> Someone's sitting in the shade today because
> someone planted a tree a long time ago.
> (Warren Buffett; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 82)

As in theme 3, the families told stories of their positive interactions with extended family, the community, and society at large regarding the rights and responsibilities of

being families. These stories far outnumbered the stories of droughts and plagues and were told at all levels of the system. Most of their stories spoke about being accepted as families within the community and society.

Microsystem Stories

All of the family members in all of the families were extremely positive about their family and really saw themselves as a strong and cohesive family unit. Many attributed their successful functioning to their optimistic attitude.

Mona said that although some might call her naïve, she saw her new family through rose-coloured glasses and liked it that way. She truly believed that her positive attitude helped others to see her as a mother to Tiffany and to see all three of them as a family unit. Because she was not defensive or negative, she perceived that others have found the whole concept of planned two-mother families less threatening.

Mesosystem Stories

All of the families described special and pivotal moments that brought them closer together as a family. After Cathy's second-parent adoption of Dylan, she said that they had a party and served cupcakes with little *Mines* on them, just as in the movie *Finding Nemo*: "Mine, mine, mine!" Many of the families with young children had an adoption party and a baby shower at the same time. Joan and her partner Jill hosted a 'Meet the Baby' barbecue when Meagan was three weeks old, and Mona and Theresa had a big get-together at the court house when the adoption took place. They all described the experience as being very emotionally powerful. It is interesting that the families with the older children did not describe these pivotal moments and that if they had adopted or received joint guardianship, it had not been done with any fanfare.

Most of the families emphasized that they were just trying to raise their children in the best way possible. Cathy summarized it well when she explained that she and Brenda wanted to make sure that their son had a good sense of stability and that he felt safe and was able to grow into a decent and gentle man who respected himself and others.

Exosystem Stories

Although all of the families told droughts and plagues stories of their experiences in the broader community, they also all talked extensively about the acceptance that they had received from the community. They all related stories about how their friends and neighbours treated them as a family.

Theresa commented that she had always felt that the broader community saw them as a family. This recognition from others helped to validate their feelings of being a family. Many of the younger families felt accepted but recognized that it had not always been the case that lesbian-led families had been recognized as an intact family. These younger families also hoped that the acceptance that they were now feeling in their community would continue when their children entered the school system and participated in extracurricular activities because they knew that this lifestyle is still not fully accepted in all environments today. They hoped that in 10 or 15 years planned two-mother families would be seen just as any other type of family and not singled out as being out of the norm. Nevertheless, today Brittney and Monica are still feeling a lack of acceptance of their family form in some areas of their lives. They reported that Louis's teacher seemed to prefer to consider him as being from a 'broken home' rather than from a home with two loving parents. Brittney and Monica also felt ostracized by some of their neighbours, but, by and large, they had had a good experience in the community. They

went as far as to say that many of their female friends joked that Brittney and Monica were very lucky and that they too wanted a wife to help around the house! Monica believed that many of their friends were also envious of the equality that was evident in her relationship with Brittney and within the household as a whole.

The families also spoke about the ongoing support and involvement of other people in their lives. Tiffany spent one day a week with her godmother, an older lesbian woman who, if things had been different when she was younger, would have probably had children of her own. Tiffany's godmother valued the time that she spent with her because she was estranged from her own extended family because she is a lesbian.

Karen and Barb spoke about taking on a mentoring role in their apartment building, helping younger women to parent more effectively. They have played a large role in many young families' lives, and it was through their involvement in the neighbourhood that they met Chris's birth mother, who knew that she could not parent another young child and thus surrendered Chris to them. It is interesting that Karen's and Barb's sexual orientation was never an issue for Chris's birth mother, but she did struggle with the idea of placing Chris with them when she realized that they were both almost 50!

Macrosystem Stories

Some of the families with older children have taken advantage of the changes in laws and policies regarding parenting in a lesbian relationship. One of the families has chosen to have the social mother as a guardian to the child, and one has gone through an official adoption procedure. In both cases this second parent status has been done rather recently, although it has been possible to do it for over five years. This is in stark contrast to the families with younger children who took advantage of a second-parent adoption

right after the birth of their child. Both Joan and Theresa spoke about the wonderful feeling of receiving their child's birth certificate and passport with *Parent* and *Parent* on it, a privilege that they would not have had in their own country of origin. They both also saw this as truly validating their relationship and their role as mothers.

Theme 5: Being an Extraordinary Family Tree in a Forest of Trees

> To be able to walk under the branches of a tree that you have planted is really to feel you have arrived with your garden. So far we are on the way: we can now stand beside ours. (Mirabel Osler; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 54)

Each group of individuals whom I interviewed were absolutely clear that they were a family. They also felt that it was the birth of the child that moved them from being a couple to being a family. Most of the families even saw themselves as stronger and more 'normal'/traditional than the heterosexual families whom they knew. They did not speak about theoretical definitions of family, nor did they discuss the components that were necessary to be a family; instead, they were just confident that they were one. They spoke about the roles and responsibilities that the family members shared and stated that the typical heterosexual role and responsibility boundaries were either very blurred in their family or did not exist. All members did what needed to be done to function as a family.

Last, many of the stories that the family members told were of the developmental milestones that they had experienced. None spent much time talking about the future, other than to say that they hoped that in 10 years researchers would not be asking questions about whether they were a family because society would have fully embraced their type of family.

The milestones that they discussed regarding child development followed a very typical progression for a child: learning to walk and talk, learning to socialize with other children, beginning school, and so on; but the developmental milestones that heterosexual individuals experienced to become a couple and a family were not the same. For example, most of the couples still had not had a commitment ceremony or married, although most had made sure either that both mothers had guardianship of the children in the relationship or that the social mother had gone through the formal adoption process.

Microsystem Stories

Many of the social mothers had experienced infertility issues in their lives, yet had always wanted to be a mother. Cathy was completely overwhelmed with joy that she was able to become a mother via Brenda's birth of Dylan. Both Cathy and Theresa spoke about pinching themselves to make sure that their being a mother was truly real, and both spoke about motherhood as being a pivotal, life-changing event in their lives. From a child's standpoint, 10-year-old Sky saw himself and his two moms as a family because they loved each other, took care of each other, and played together.

None of the families felt that they went out of their way to be special or unique; they were just living their lives in the best way that they knew. But even though they did not try to be different, they were aware that some people saw them that way. It is interesting that some people saw them as better at being parents and a family than their own heterosexual-led family was.

Brenda explained that both she and Cathy had truly improved their behaviour since they became parents. They did not want to set a poor example for their child as so many of their heterosexual friends did. On a similar note, Jill commented that she saw her

family as more traditional than most of the heterosexual families she knew. She also believed that it is ironic that people fight gay marriage when the planned two-mother families whom she knew were much more stable than the married heterosexual families whom she knew.

One of the most touching stories that I heard in this study was Karen's. She spoke about an occurrence between her and Kory when he was about three years old. Kory was trying to figure out his family and said to Karen, "Everyone has a mom, right, Mom? . . . And everybody has a dad, right? . . . But not everybody has a Barb, do they, Mom? . . . [And] not very many people know what a Barb is, do they, Mom?" (5, 365). When she replied that he was right that most people did not know what a Barb is, he looked at her in a way that made her feel that the world had been lifted off his shoulders. Karen felt that it was then that he knew that he was not "crazy" and that although other families had a mom and a dad, he had a mom and a Barb; and that was perfectly okay even though most grown-ups did not understand. She reported that after that exchange she knew that everything would be all right, and he never again questioned his family composition.

Mesosystem Stories

The families in this study (and their friends and extended families) felt lucky that they were not confined by societally defined gender roles in their family. They believed that it did not matter how progressive the heterosexual families were, they could never match the equality of the planned two-mother families. These families commented that, really, they were just like all other types of families. They had the "same day-to-day routines, same battles, and same problems" (6, 1406) as heterosexual families did.

Donna remembered Sky telling her on more than one occasion when he was about four years old that his friends said he was so lucky to have two moms instead of a mom and a dad. After this had happened a few times, she began to ask his little friends why they felt that Sky was so lucky, and these little boys told her that it was because "Sky has two people to tuck him in at night, two people to bake him cookies, and two people to love him." Donna said that the funny part about this was that neither of them baked! However, she also thought that it was sad that these little children from intact heterosexual-led families somehow felt cheated because they had a dad and that, obviously, their dads did not do the little things that four-year-olds want parents to do.

Exosystem Stories

The families all spoke about the flexibility of the roles and responsibilities in their family and valued this. Another flexibility in the families was what to call the parents. None of the families knew of heterosexual families in which the children were allowed to decide what to call their parents; the parents were simply called some derivative of *Mother* and *Father*. Yet all six of the families allowed their children to choose to call the parents by their first names or some derivative of *Mother*. Among the families with older children, most of the children alternated between calling their parents *Mom* or using their first names. These families saw this as a further extension of the equality that existed in their homes.

Summary

In summary, all six families in the study discussed all five themes. The stories of the droughts and plagues were much more pronounced in the families with school-aged children than in those with infants, which may be a result of their having lived together

longer as families with children, but it may also reflect how much more challenging it was about six years ago to become pregnant and parent before the laws began to change in this province. The families had a balance in their stories, the smooth and the rough, but underneath it all, there was no question that they saw themselves as a family.

INTERTEXT 7: THE CANADIAN CONSTITUTION: A LIVING TREE TO SUPPORT AND REFUTE GAY MARRIAGE

The analogy of the tree has been used to describe many things. In Canada it describes the Constitution. The Canadian Constitution Act was proclaimed in 1867, when Canada became a country. But it was not until 1982 that Canada brought home its Constitution from Britain and made it its own. In 1985 the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect, but although section 15(1) protected many groups from discrimination, it did not provide protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation. It was not until 1995, after the Egan and Nesbitt v. Canada ruling, that sexual orientation was finally read into the Constitution, and the Canadian Human Rights Act was amended to include sexual-orientation issues and prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (EGALE, 2002). The Constitution has been compared to a tree by those speaking both for and against same-sex marriage (and families). The following quotations elucidate this point:

> The *Constitution Act*, 1867 . . . did not entrench the common law definition of "marriage" as it stood in 1867. The "frozen concepts" reasoning runs contrary to one of the most fundamental principles of Canadian constitutional interpretation: that our Constitution is a living tree which, by way of progressive interpretation, accommodates and addresses the realities of modern life. (Lexum, 2004, Question 1 section, ¶ 1)

> The justices of the Supreme Court assert that they have the right to authorize the government to change the definition of marriage since "our Constitution is a living tree which, by way of progressive interpretation, accommodates and addresses the realities of modern life." The idea is that perhaps in the past marriage was for a man and a woman, but now the tree has grown, and society has changed, and so for us now marriage can be between persons of the same sex. Now more people can have the right to marriage.

> Of course the law changes and perhaps our Constitution grows like a tree. Many things develop. But the fact of development is not the issue. The question is: Is this particular proposed development legitimate? There must be some standard for determining that, some inner principle for discerning whether or not a development builds organically upon what is good, in a way that is consistent with what has gone before and, more importantly, with the nature of the organism. An acorn becomes an oak. It does not become a rose. There needs to be some limit to the "progressive interpretation" by the judges, or they can authorize anything that any group in society asks for, as long as the group phrases the request in the language of rights. (Collins, 2005, ¶ 19)

These two quotations demonstrate both how far we *have* and how far we have *not* come in seeing all as equal in the eyes of God, the Constitution, and country. It is only now in 2005 that gays and lesbians in this country are finally allowed to marry. Yet there are still issues across Canada such as the ability of same-sex couples to adopt that have not been resolved. The rights and responsibilities of gays and lesbians and the families whom we create have come a long way in only 38 years since Trudeau said, "The state has no business in the bedrooms of the nation" (Goldie, 2001, p. 18), but we are not yet at the end of our journey to equality. Although many of the laws of the land have changed, the attitudes of many in society are still prejudicial and discriminatory towards lesbians and their families. It is not enough to change laws and policies; true equality cannot be achieved until the attitudes of the populace fall into line.

CHAPTER 7: COMPLETING THE GROWTH CYCLE

> Evolution did not intend trees to grow singly. Far more than ourselves they are social creatures, and no more natural as isolated specimens than man is as a marooned sailor or hermit. (John Fowles; as cited in Garofalo, 1999, ¶ 87)

Completing the Growth Cycle

As a tree begins with a little seed, this research began with my quest for information about families like mine. This passionate pursuit led me to ask other families like mine to tell me their family stories. Through this process I became aware of the power of family narratives and that, in spite of the lack of predefined family roles and responsibilities, we as planned two-mother families have been able to very successfully construct what it means to be a family. The stories that my family and the other families who participated in this research told were stories of success, sometimes in spite of almost insurmountable odds. The stories that they told were about their strengths and their struggles. But what came through in all of the interviews was that, when given lemons, they made lemonade. Even the struggles that they faced in becoming pregnant, navigating the services during pregnancy and delivery, and continuing to navigate as their children grew have become stories of growth and learning. Each family's tree blows in the wind, its leaves talking to the other trees in the forest, the old-growth forest, teaching those family trees that this new species of tree is here to stay and that the new growth can actually teach them how to become an even stronger family tree themselves.

Before this research I did not know any other planned two-mother families in this city, or at least I did not know that I knew them. When family 5 contacted me about

participating in the research, I realized that I knew one of the mothers. I had sat across the table from her at interagency meetings for over 10 years. It is surprising that neither of us knew of the other's family. We had both heard that the other was a lesbian and had children, but we had never spoken about being in a planned two-mother family. To me this speaks volumes about our invisibility as families. This invisibility has prevented us from supporting one another and from exposing our children to other families like ours.

Once I decided that my research would have a self-reflective segment, I began to keep a reflective journal on how I was feeling and what I was thinking about my family and other planned two-mother families. In writing this dissertation, I was able to look back at my journal to aid in my reflection on the process. Additionally, over the past 10 years I have participated in three research projects on same-sex relationships and families. Two of these were done by undergraduate students as part of a course requirement and one was done by a Masters student in journalism who did the study as her major project during her degree. At the time I did not think about asking them for a copy of my interview transcript, audiotape, or videotape. However, I went back to these individuals when I decided to involve myself as a researcher and participant in this study. Unfortunately, none of the people who interviewed me ever published any of this information; nor did they finish the research projects for which I was interviewed. The undergraduates did write a paper from the information but neither had kept a copy of the paper. The Masters student did not even complete a paper from the interview. In addition, none of them kept the data, and therefore it is impossible for me to look back at my previous conversations with researchers to determine whether my thoughts about my

family have changed with time. This lack of publication of these studies contributes to the on-going invisibility of lesbians, their relationships, and their families.

Social Relevance and Implications of the Current Research

The last decade has signalled many changes for lesbians and their families. This province, though, has lagged behind many others in terms of granting equal rights to lesbian-led families. In Alberta, lesbians now have access to fertility clinics and the ability to adopt the children whom they conceive in their relationship, to have both mothers' names on the birth certificate, to claim family status for such things as extended health benefits, to file income tax as a family, to apply for Canadian Pension Plan survivor benefits, to access a partner's pension after death, and finally, now, to marry and conceive children within a true marriage. These same rights are now available in most jurisdictions in Canada (Fisher, 2004). None of this was possible a mere decade ago, and many people did not even believe that it would come anytime soon. Perhaps some day lesbians and gays will be able to adopt biologically unrelated children through the public system in this province too.

The results of this study are in line with those of many other studies on lesbian-led families: Our children and our families are doing well. The importance of the choice-to-parent narrative was clearly illustrated by virtue of the fact that, regardless of the age of the children, all of the families in the study spoke about the process of becoming pregnant, the pregnancy, and the delivery. They also all discussed the role of the social mother and the importance of her being viewed as a mother, both socially and legally. These micro- and mesosystem narratives reflect the finding in the literature that the decision to parent is a monumental decision for a couple. Some of the couples also talked

about how the exo- and macrosystems hindered them from achieving pregnancy at the time and in the way that they would have initially chosen to do it. This was especially true for those couples with older children. Time or chronosystem variables have played a significant role in the formation of some of the planned two-mother families.

This study is particularly valuable in that I was able to capture the stories of family from planned two-mother families at one point in time, in one specific location (Edmonton). By narrowing the inclusion criteria, I collected rich, in-depth descriptions of family. In addition, by focusing broadly on the concept of what is family, I was able to delve deeply into what makes a family, how it forms, and how it continues to function even when it is discriminated against and marginalized. Although the goal was not to interview resilient families, because an inclusion criterion was to interview intact planned two-mother families who conceived a child together, it delved deeply into families who were resilient because they were able to continue to function often in the face of adversity. Chronosystem dimensions not only played a part in the progression from couple to family with children, but they also influenced the families' choices regarding which schools to attend, in which neighbourhoods to live, and how 'out' mothers and children were willing to be without jeopardizing their individual and family safety.

Macro- and exosystem changes in laws and policies have allowed the younger families to have greatly improved access to services such as fertility clinics and second-parent adoption, to make name changes easily, and for the social mother to be legally recognized as a mother to the child. Although some of the families with older children have now taken advantage of improved family recognition, the reason they have done this has in most cases been to increase the ease of travelling outside the country, not to

increase their own recognition of themselves as families. They defined themselves as families in the absence of exo- and macrosystem recognition.

Like the families in Gabb's (2004a) qualitative study of lesbians with children in England, the families in this study had essentially only one version of their stories of family life. Their stories were constructed from a shared belief system and were reflective, which illustrated that, like Gabb's stories, these had been worked over by the families and represented their agreed-upon position. Relating this finding back to human ecological theory, it seems clear that although the participants told stories that could be called ontological and microsystem stories, through repeated telling of the stories they became micro- and mesosystem stories.

As in the work of Laird (2000) and Morningstar (1999), these families spoke about the lack of role models for parenting as a same-sex dyad and appreciated that they had the opportunity to design their familial roles in a more egalitarian way than they perceived was possible with heterosexual couples. Even though some of the families in this study experienced marginalization and the lack of role models, all of them demonstrated that in many ways, as the literature suggests (e.g. Brewaeys, 2001; Fitzgerald, 1999; Golombok et al., 1997; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 1992; Perry et al., 2004; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 1999) they function as families as well as, if not better than, the heterosexual families whom they know.

Similarly to past research, this study is not without its limitations. All of the families who participated were middle class, White, employed, urban, out, and well educated. Only one family member in the entire study was non-White (she was Aboriginal), for only two English was not their first language (French and Hebrew), and

only one family was non-Christian (Jewish). The length of the relationship varied greatly, however, from 3 to 17 years; as did the ages of the children, from 6 months to 14 years.

The characteristics of the sample have both pros and cons. It allowed me to delve deeply into a particular subset of lesbian-led families and to explore in depth the question about which I was most passionate, but it did not allow me to necessarily generalize these findings to lesbian-led families across Canada. The results of this study can definitely inform other current studies on lesbian-led families, such as those being conducted by Fiona Kelly in the Faculty of Law at UBC or the pan-Canadian study on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) families being carried out by the Université du Québec à Montréal. My study is unique in its focus on only planned two-mother families, my insistence that the whole family (both the mothers and all children) participate in the interview to discuss their family, and in the drawing of pictures by family members at the beginning and end of the interview. Although these drawings were not analyzed in this document, it is my intention to do so in a subsequent paper. At this point I used the drawings to serve the purpose of focusing the family members on aspects of their family before I began to ask them questions; then in the end I used the cooperative family drawing to bring it all together to portray their family as a family through art. This study, by virtue of having the families describe in rich detail the stories and lived experiences of their families, allowed me as the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge about planned two-mother families and about the characteristics that allow these families to thrive in less than ideal environments.

This research, like the research of those who have come before, clearly illustrates that children not only survive, but also thrive in planned two-mother families. As Golombok (2005) so eloquently stated:

> It is no longer appropriate to assume that traditional families are good for children and that unusual families are bad. What matters for children's psychological well-being is not simply whether the mother is lesbian or heterosexual, single or married. Instead, what really matters is the same for all families—it is the quality of family life. The problems faced by children in nontraditional families are not problems in parenting but of prejudice from the outside world. But social attitudes are not fixed. They can, and do, change. (p. 12)

Given the quickly changing laws and policies that lesbians are seeing in Canada, this study, by virtue of its focus on children conceived before and after these changes began, allows those involved in policy design and programming to see the direct impact of their changes on lesbian-led families, although this was not the focus of the study. I hope that this information will lead policy and law makers to be more inclusive in their initiatives while still recognizing that there are many families in the forest who were formed before these initiatives were in place and who might not have availed themselves of the newfound privileges.

Those involved in providing direct services to families such as social workers, family therapists, youth workers, healthcare workers and childcare workers can learn from this work, as can teachers and others in the field of education. All of these professionals should be aware that although there are a number of similarities between children parented in heterosexual-led homes and those in lesbian-led homes (and more specifically, in planned two-mother homes) there are definitely some differences. As Stacey and Biblarz (2001) pointed out, many of these differences are positive in support of those in lesbian-led homes, but there are also some unique differences that could be

viewed as having negative impacts upon planned two-mother families. All people working with these families and children have the opportunity to help them feel included in their schools, communities, and social institutions, by ensuring that policies, materials such as application forms and other publications aimed at families and children do not inadvertently exclude, marginalize, or stigmatize planned two-mother families. Professionals also have a responsibility to make sure that these families and their children are not discriminated against because of their family form. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well the Alberta Human Rights Legislation protect *all* forms of families. In addition, the Standards of Practice and Codes of Conduct for those in professional positions, such as teachers and social workers, prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Most of the stories that the families and their children told were those of inclusion, but it is worth noting the stories that spoke of exclusion, marginalization, stigmatization, or bullying were a result of others objecting to their family composition. One tangible item that families used to gauge their level of inclusion or exclusion from a service was the application forms in the agency. If these forms presume heterosexuality by asking for mother and father, planned two-mother families know that they may not be perceived as a family. Professionals can be of great assistance in helping planned two-mother families feel included by changing agency forms to address the varying family forms. Sensitivity training should be provided for all professionals with regards to working with same-sex families. For example, statements that convey that those in mainstream society really understand what it means to live in a planned two-mother family, such as "I know how you feel", should be avoided as they can be taken to trivialize the feelings of those in these families. Most laws have now

changed in favour of not differentiating between heterosexual-led families and same-sex-led families, but attitudes and practices still often lag behind, which is the reason professional development is so very important. In many cases the frontline policies and practices have not changed to reflect higher order changes.

The above statements can be valuable to individuals who hold policy making positions within organizations and at all levels of government. Documents need to reflect the changing family forms and the multitude of parenting combinations who now raise children.

Given the fact that this research and past research has shown that many lesbian-led families do a superb job at raising children, more lesbian mothers should be invited to present at prenatal and parenting classes to provide heterosexual-led families with strategies that help children to grow up as strong and as resilient as possible.

One example of a specific policy change could be for the government to issue 'parent certificates' to list *all* those who parent a child, thereby reserving the birth certificate to list only the genetic or biological parents. This would then mean that, for example, when a child is adopted, their birth certificate does not change, just their parent certificate. It could also allow for more than two parents to be listed at any given time on the certificate. Therefore, it would be the parent certificate, not the birth certificate that is used for identification purposes, thereby giving a truer picture of who parents a child.

Furthermore, more research on lesbian-led families could be conducted that specifically emphasizes a policy-development, implementation, and evaluation outcome. For example, analyzing the impact of governmental policies in health, education, and social services on planned two-mother families could be completed. This research has

completed with other populations (e.g. families involved in informal caregiving (Fast, Eales, and Keating, 2001)), but because not enough has been know about planned two-mother families this type of analysis has not been possible in the past. This study, as well as others currently underway, should make it possible to consider this question and others since we still lack large random samples of non-heterosexual-led families. Until recently limited to no information on sexual orientation was collected within national samples such as the General Social Survey or by the Census.

What Does This Research on Planned Two-Mother Families Offer to Research on Families?

Reflecting on the Vanier Institute of the Family's (2005) definition of *family*, as discussed in chapter 1, as any combination of two or more persons who assume responsibilities for each other's ongoing development and are bound together over time by these ties, I believe that the families in this study meet these criteria. The families clearly provided care and maintenance for one another, welcomed new members, worked hard to provide positive socialization for the children, meted out discipline and consequences when necessary, worked both inside and outside the home and family to support its continued viability, and, most important, provided strong nurturance and love to one another. They also meet Hartman's (1999) and Walsh's (1993) functional definitions of family. The families were emotionally committed, financially interdependent, and lived together as an exclusive unit over time (Hartman). They were interconnected; exhibited respect for differences and autonomy; nurtured one another; protected each other from outside persecution; socialized the children together; were stable over time, yet adaptable to change; communicated openly, including effectively

problem solving issues and conflicts; possessed a shared belief system; and provided the resources for economic and psychosocial security (Walsh). As discussed in the literature review, I believe that these definitions, although adequate, do not take into account the unique features and circumstances of planned two-mother families, such as living from day to day with being marginalized and oppressed and the fact that they are often invisible to the heterosexual mainstream. The information on this particular type of family and its characteristics can contribute to the expansion of family theory and changing definitions of family. This study also advances knowledge about how each member of the family sees her or his family and which family stories are more salient for her or him. It also provides pictorial displays of how family members envision their family and how the family as a whole sees itself. In addition, the recorded transcripts can also be reviewed, to elicit information regarding family interactional patterns, family storytelling patterns, and information on how the family makes decisions in performing a cooperative task.

Past research has demonstrated that lesbian mothers are at least as capable as heterosexual mothers and fathers at raising competent children who are able to function exceptionally well in all aspects of their lives (e.g. Brewaeys & van Hall, 1997; Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Golombok et al., 1997; Nelson, 1999; Patterson, 1992; Perry et al., 2004; Tasker, 1999). For this reason this study and those that have preceded it should be further incorporated into the general literature on families. In addition, the information from these studies should be taught in all classes that have a family focus, both inside and outside of academia. Lesbian-led families and, more specifically, planned two-mother families have much to offer the study of families.

This research demonstrates that families, even when they live in less than ideal conditions, can cope exceptionally well and display characteristics that show their resiliency as individuals and families, even though many in society still do not see them as intact families. The information regarding these qualities could be collected and used to design a workshop for other marginalized families to teach them how to cope in a less than ideal situation.

Regarding the issue of marginalization, it is worth noting that although recent studies that have focused on planned two-mother families and, more generally, lesbian-led families have treated these families as central to the research rather than as marginalized family forms, large-scale studies on families need to include categories such as same-sex family in the demographic questions. If the large-scale studies do not recognize same-sex families as a group, then it will continue to be difficult to discuss how these families operate within society because research will be lacking. Many of the past large-scale studies have either excluded same-sex families or not recognized them as such and have therefore grouped them within the categories of divorced families or single mother-led families.

From a human ecological standpoint, each level of the system affects all other levels. Therefore, changes in the broader macrosystem, such as the recognition of same-sex marriage, impact the individual (ontological level) and microsystems (family), thereby potentially leading to changes in individual's attitudes towards same-sex families. In turn, the more liberal attitudes of younger individuals (ontological level) and families (microsystem) influence how quickly the Canadian laws and policies (macrosystem) changed regarding same-sex marriage and how quickly further changes in

the exosystem (community) and macrosystem (society) will happen in areas such as public adoption of children by same-sex families in Alberta.

Last, given recent changes in policies such as access to artificial insemination and the laws regarding adoption and birth registration, it seems that the younger families have had an easier time of identifying as family and greater support from the community. This information could be used to design other policies and laws that would be more inclusive of lesbian-led families.

What Wasn't Said?

Often it is valuable to reflect on what was possibly not said. Reflecting on the stories that the families told, I realize that no one spoke about differences in parenting styles, conflict in the relationship or in the family, or extended family's or the biological father's interference in the family and its functioning. The picture that these families presented was that all of the oppression and negativity occurred at the community and societal levels, whereas the positives happened at all levels of the system.

Another issue that was not addressed was the societal (macrosystem) level stories about how extraordinary the families are. The peer-reviewed literature clearly demonstrated that in many ways, lesbian-led families are as good as, if not better than, heterosexual families at childrearing. Yet the families in this study did not tell any stories about how the exo- and macrosystem sees them as superior. In summary, the exo- and macrosystem still do not see the positive attributes of planned two-mother families as much. The planned two-mother families have surrounded themselves in meso- and exosystems that support them, and thus they did not discuss the non-exo- and macrosystem level droughts and plagues that they were currently facing. The older

families did, however, discuss exosystem resistance from family to their achieving pregnancy and exosystem resistance from friends in the lesbian community who were not prepared to accept couples who were making the intentional choice to become pregnant and parent.

Reflections on the New-Growth Forest: Recommendations for Future Research

Future research can take many directions. Clearly, there needs to be much more Canadian research on lesbian-led families; more specifically, on planned two-mother families. Since I began my doctoral program, there has been an exponential growth in the number of studies on lesbian- and gay-led families in Canada. Currently, there are large research projects on LGBT families being conducted (University of British Columbia and Université du Québec à Montréal). Over the next five years this research should be published, and our knowledge on these families will be much greater. Within the past year both the *Canadian Women's Studies Journal* (*24*[2/3]) and the *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* (*22*[2]) have produced special editions featuring LGBT issues. In addition, a new journal specifically aimed at LGBT families (*Journal of GLBT Family Studies*) has begun publication last year.

As researchers we still do not know enough about planned two-mother families to be able to comment on the impact of policy and law changes. We also do not know how gay-led families and, more specifically, planned two-father families define family and how current laws and policies and changes in laws and policies impact them. Moreover, similar research on planned two-mother families could occur in other parts of Canada and abroad to determine whether the themes identified in this study also occur in more liberal

parts of Canada or in more conservative or liberal countries. In addition, a similar study could be conducted on families who are not White, educated, and middle class, if any can be found. Analogous studies could also focus on families with older children or on planned two-mother families in which the children have been adopted, through either a private or the public system. Moreover, the construct of resiliency of planned two-mother families (Oswald, 2002) should be further explored, because it is clear from this research and past research that those lesbian-led families who choose to participate in research clearly exhibit many of the qualities that have been described in the mainstream family literature as qualities of resiliency. Although the research on lesbian-led families has not often labelled the families they interviewed as resilient, I believe that it is now possible for a researcher to look across these studies and conduct a meta-analysis of them with the goal of describing the resiliency in these families. This research could then be used to examine other types of families to investigate their levels of resiliency against adversity. Last, extended family members could also be asked to tell stories about the planned two-mother family, thereby adding a multigenerational component to the research. In essence, there are many, many directions in which future research could proceed because so little is known about planned two-mother families.

I/We Are Family! Creative Synthesis

This dissertation is about growth; more specifically, about a new species of trees that, I hope, can live among the older species of trees in the same forest—not a forest separate from other forests, but a forest that grows among the forests of the world. As Benkov (1995) so aptly stated, in order to do good research on lesbians, one must see them as central to the research, not marginal. Theories and methods must come, not from

a heteronormative orientation, but from a place that privileges the experiences of lesbians. I believe that I have done this through including both my experiences as a member of a planned two-mother family and those of the planned two-mother families who participated in this research, and through my choice of theories (human ecological theory and standpoint theory) and method (heuristic inquiry). This study examined the subjective reality (constructivism) of what family means to these families, and it was these elements that drove and fuelled the study.

Central to this work was my passion to gain a better understanding of planned two-mother families and to reflect on what family means to me. When I began this research I felt very marginal, part of a group of individuals who really does not fit into what society considers 'the family.' In the end I found that in many ways my family and the families whom I interviewed have worked so hard to create family that, as many of them said in their interviews, they are 'more normal' and 'more a family' than are many of the heterosexual families whom they know. They have children, not because it was expected of them or because of a contraceptive failure, but rather because every child in this study was planned. Often they chose to parent even though initially their extended families did not support their choice. Every couple had to work to become pregnant, often against the odds and without the help of mainstream services. All of the families have continued to work every day to be 'family.' They have continued to battle the odds and have not only survived, but also thrived as a family. The families in this study built their families 'their way', many without the life experiences and role models to define planned two-mother families; many, like mine, in isolation from other planned two-mother families. Yet we have succeeded in being families. We see it every day in the health and

wellness of our children, all of whom are thriving, living life as a part of new-growth trees, often in an old-growth forest. A few of the families recognized that things are changing. No longer are they just lone family trees in foreign forests or the only one of a particular species in a forest. There is now a growing number of *their* species. The numbers have now grown large enough in this city that as a species we can get together and cross pollinate.

This year, 2005, saw the first playgroup for children of planned two-mother families in this city. At the first meeting 15 families met, socialized, and talked about their family trees among similar trees. We stood tall and proud, with our branches waving in the wind. Some of us had conceived our children together, whereas others had privately adopted their children. Regardless of how we did it . . . WE ARE FAMILY!

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APPENDIX A:

ADVERTISEMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Appendix A: Advertisement for Participants

Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
302 Human Ecology Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1
Phone: (780) 492-3824
Fax: (780) 492-4821

Are you interested in participating in research on lesbian families with children?

Currently, a PhD student in the Department of Human Ecology is conducting a study on the experiences of lesbian families with children. The purpose of this study is to explore their family experiences. I am interested in speaking to families in which the children were conceived by the couple in their current relationship.

The study will involve two (2) family interviews with both mothers and their children. Each interview will take about one to two hours of your time.

If you are interested in finding out more about this study, please call Deborah Foster at 965-1621 or through email at dfoster@ualberta.ca. All inquiries will be kept in strictest confidence.

APPENDIX B:

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Appendix B: Information Sheet for Prospective Participants

Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
302 Human Ecology Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1
Phone: (780) 492-3824
Fax: (780) 492-4821

Information Sheet for Prospective Adult Participants

Title of Research: **'Til death do us part? The experience of lesbian-led families with children'**

Principal Investigator: Deborah Foster, BSc, MSc, RSW
Doctoral Candidate in Human Ecology
University of Alberta
Email: dfoster@ualberta.ca

Advisor: Dr. Maryanne Doherty, PhD
Associate Dean, Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Email: mdoherty@ualberta.ca

July 2, 2004

Dear Potential Participant:

I am conducting a research study on the experiences of lesbian couples that have had children together. I am hoping to interview both members of the couple together with any children they have conceived together that are old enough to participate in the interview.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the family experiences of lesbian families with children who were conceived in a lesbian-led family. This study is intended to collect information on what it means to be in a lesbian family. I, the researcher, am interested in your most memorable family stories and your experiences as a family.

Methods: You are being asked to talk to me, the researcher, about being part of a lesbian family. I will ask your family to draw a few pictures and answer some questions, which you can answer in your own words. There are no right or wrong answers. This interview will last for about 1 to 2 hours. After the first interview, you and your partner will be asked to talk to me again in a few weeks to ensure that I understand what you meant and to ask other questions that might have been missed in the first interview. This second and last interview should take about 1 hour, if it is necessary to do.

Confidentiality: The interview will be recorded on tape. I, the principal investigator, will type the transcript or a transcriptionist who has signed an oath of confidentiality will type them. Although your name and identifying information will appear on the audiotape, all identifying information will be removed when it is transcribed onto paper. Only the investigator will know the identifying information, which will be stored separately from the transcripts. All information will be stored in a locked cabinet. Computer files will be saved on my password-protected laptop, to which no one else has access. Only my doctoral supervisory committee and I will review the transcripts, drawings, and other memorabilia. It is the law that anything you might say in the interview about a child being abused has to be reported to Alberta Children's Services.

Benefits: The only direct benefit that you might experience from this study is the opportunity to tell your family stories. However, we hope that this research will help society to better understand the experiences of lesbian families.

Risks: It is not expected that being in this study will harm you. However, you may feel bad or angry at the various systems in society. I, the researcher, will talk to you about these feelings and can help you and your family to find counselling resources that you need to deal with these issues. You will be provided with a list of counselling resources that you can access if you feel the need to.

Withdrawal from the study: Even after you have agreed to do the interview, you can decide that you do not want to continue the interview before, in the middle of, or after the interview. You can also decide after the first or second interview that you do not want what you said to be used. If you alert me within one month of your completed second interview (or review and approval of the transcript from the first interview, if a second interview does not take place), I will be able to remove want you have said.

Use of your information: This study is being conducted for a doctoral dissertation. Neither the government of Alberta nor the University of Alberta is paying for this study. The results will be put together in a dissertation. If you wish, I can mail a short version of this report to you. This information may also be used in future publications or presented at conferences.

For further information contact:

- Deborah Foster, Doctoral Student, Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta, 469-4684, email dfoster@ualberta.ca

- Dr. Maryanne Doherty, Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, 492-7375, email: mdoherty@ualberta.ca

If you would like to speak to someone who is not involved with the study, you may contact Georgie Jarvis, Office of the Dean, Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics, 492-4931 or 492-7042, email: Georgie.Jarvis@ualberta.ca

Department of Human Ecology
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Information Sheet for Children

My name is Deborah Foster. I am doing a project at the University of Alberta so I can finish school. This project is looking at families with two mothers and their children that are in school. I want to ask you and your family some questions about your family and have you all draw some pictures about your family. I want to know about your family and some of your family stories. It will take about two hours to do this. I will also ask you to show me stuff you have that is about your family. In a few weeks I will probably come back and ask your mothers a few more questions about your family to make sure I get things right.

I will be tape recording our talk and I will write down the things you say. I will not tell anyone your name or your mothers' names but I will be writing a story that will be put in a book about other families like yours. I will use made up names for the people in your family in the story. If you decide after talking to me about your family that you do not want me to use your stories then you can let me know and I will not include them in my book.

If talking about your family upsets you or makes you angry or sad I can find you someone who will talk to you about your troubles if you want. If you tell me that someone is abusing you, I have to tell Children's Services so that you can get help. That would be the only time I would have to tell anyone your real name.

I hope you enjoy talking to me about your family.

APPENDIX C:

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form for Parents

of Children Participating in the Study

Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
302 Human Ecology Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1
Phone: (780) 492-3824
Fax: (780) 492-4821

Informed Consent Form for Parents of Children Participating in the Study

Title of Research Project: **'Til death do us part? The experience of lesbian-led families with children.**

Principal Investigator: Deborah Foster, BSc, MSc, RSW, PhD Candidate in Human Ecology, University of Alberta
Email: dfoster@ualberta.ca

Advisor: Dr. Maryanne Doherty, PhD, Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
Email: mdoherty@ualberta.ca

Please circle your answers:

1. Do you understand that your children have been asked to be in a research study?

Yes No

2. Do you understand the benefits and risks for your children taking part in this study?

Yes No

3. Do you understand that your children's participation is voluntary and they may choose to leave the study at any time?

Yes No

I agree to have my children take part in this study and give permission for the data collected to be used for the purposes described in the information sheet for this study.

_____ _____ _____

Printed Name Signature of Research Participant Date

Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
302 Human Ecology Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1
Phone: (780) 492-3824
Fax: (780) 492-4821

Informed Consent Form for Children

Project About Families With Two Mothers and Their Children

Researcher: Deborah Foster

Please circle your answers:

1.	Do you know you were asked to be in my project?	Yes No
2.	Did you read the information sheet?	Yes No
3.	Did I answer all your questions about my project?	Yes No
4.	Do you understand what abuse is?	Yes No
5.	Do you know you can change your mind about being in this project?	Yes No
6.	Are you ok if I use my tape recorder with you?	Yes No
7.	Do you know I am going to use the information you tell me in projects I do?	Yes No

I agree to be in this project and I am OK that you use the information in this project and other projects.

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name	Sign Your Name	Today's Date

Informed Consent Form

Department of Human Ecology

University of Alberta
302 Human Ecology Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2N1
Phone: (780) 492-3824
Fax: (780) 492-4821

Title of Research Project:	'Til Death Do Us Part? The Lived Experience of Two-Mother Families with Elementary School Children
Principal Investigator:	Deborah Foster, BSc, MSc, RSW, Doctoral Candidate in Human Ecology, University of Alberta Email: dfoster@ualberta.ca
Co-Investigator:	Dr. Maryanne Doherty, PhD, Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta Email: mdoherty@ualberta.ca

Please circle your answers:

1. Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Yes	No
2. Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	Yes	No
3. Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this study?	Yes	No
4. Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes	No
5. Do you understand that your participation is voluntary and you may choose to leave the study at any time? You do not have to give a reason and there will be no consequences for not participating.	Yes	No
6. Has confidentiality been explained to you?	Yes	No
7. Do you consent to being audio taped during the interviews?	Yes	No
8. Do you understand who will be able to see or hear what you said?	Yes	No
9. Do you know what the information you say will be used for?	Yes	No
10. Do you understand that the researchers may also publish the findings from the the interviews or present the findings at conferences?	Yes	No
11. Do you consent for the data to be used in the future for other studies?	Yes	No

I agree to take part in this study.

_____ _____ _____

Printed Name Signature of Research Participant Date

APPENDIX D:

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Research Questions

Overarching Question:

What are the family experiences and stories of planned lesbian families with children?

Exercise:

I have brought a number of types of paper and drawing instruments. Could everyone in the family please choose a piece of paper and draw me a picture of your family. Could each of you do this on your own. Thank you for doing this.

Could you tell me about your picture please?

Now, I would like to ask you a number a questions about being a family.

Guiding Question:

Tell me about your family.

The following is a list of possible secondary questions that may be used to help the phenomena and it's meaning unfold.

1. Could you tell me more about your family?
2. Could you tell me another memorable story about your family?
3. Could you tell me about the picture you drew?
4. Are there any other issues you would like to discuss or do you have any other written, pictorial, or verbal information that you deem important for me to be aware of in my search for the meaning of family to lesbian-led families?

Exercise:

Now, could you as a group choose a piece of paper and as a group work together to draw a picture of your family? Again, thank you for doing this drawing. Could you now please tell me about your family picture?